No. 1186
8 June –
21 June 2007
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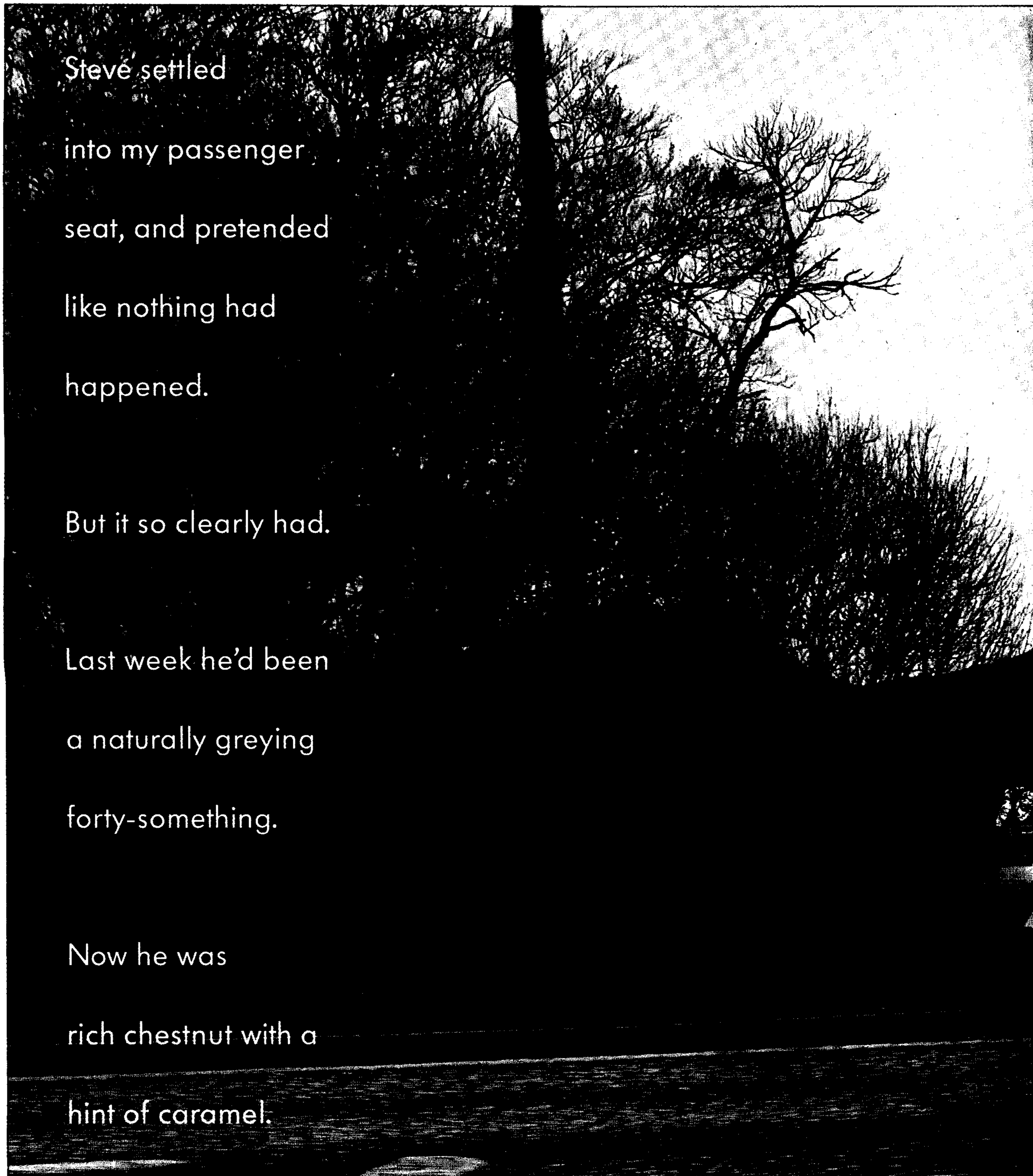

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PRIVATE EYE SUBSCRIPTIONS/SALES
PO Box 326, Sittingbourne, Kent ME9 8FA.
Subscription enquiries: 01795 414 871
Overseas: +44 (0) 1795 414 870 Fax: 01795 414 555.
Web: www.subsonline.co.uk
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SUBSCRIPTION RATES
£24 per annum. Europe and Eire £32. Airmail (rest of world) £38. Cheques/POs to Private Eye. Mastercard/Visa.

ADVERTISING
Ten Alps Publishing, 9 Savoy Street, London WC2E 7HR.
Email: private-eye@tenalpspublishing
Display: 020 7878 2303 **Classified:** 020 7240 9129

Published by Pressdram Ltd, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. **Printed** by BGP Ltd, Bicester OX6 7QZ . **Distributed** by P.E. Distributions, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN. 020 7437 4017.

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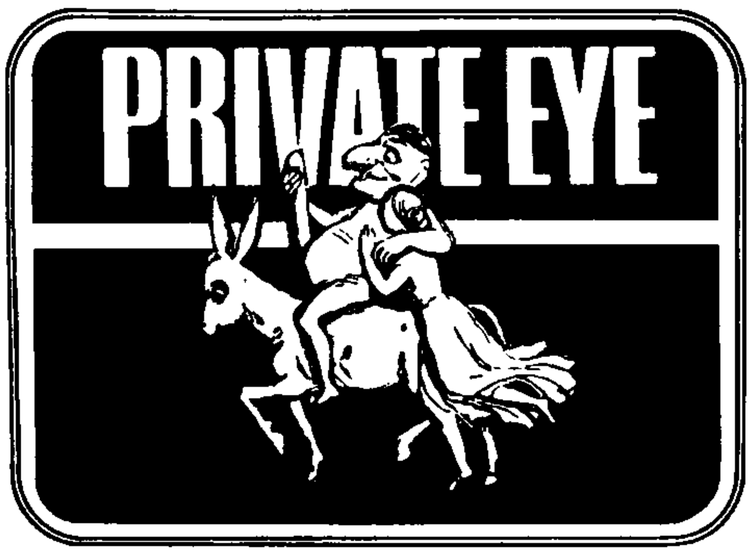


THOUGH armed forces chiefs may have drawn up plans to bring British troops home from Iraq as soon as possible, it is not entirely sure that Gordon Brown will follow their timetable once he is prime minister.

Quite apart from the pressure exerted on him by President Bush to stay the course, the UK's own Iraq Commission is due to report next month. Its composition hardly suggests that it is about to recommend a dramatic change of course or withdrawal.

Of the three chairs, Paddy Ashdown was one of the few leading Liberals to back the war from the outset, while the former Tory defence secretary Tom King made blood-curdling speeches about Saddam's "accelerated" WMD programme and criticised anti-war demonstrators. Baroness Jay claims to have been sceptical, but made little protest at the time.

In addition, the Foreign Policy Centre think tank that set up the commission relies on funding from "partners" such as the Armor Group and Control Risks, both of whom make money by supplying armed guards to protect ministers and executives in Iraq. The think-tank even found room for a Control Risks delegate, Eric Westropp, at debates it arranged at the Labour and Tory party conferences in 2004.

Westropp gave an absurdly optimistic presentation, telling delegates that his private security guards had easily won over Iraqi hearts and minds through a "a smiley-wavy policy". Given such opportunities to get in on the debate, the firms will surely do all they can to promote the role of their businesses in a continuing occupation.

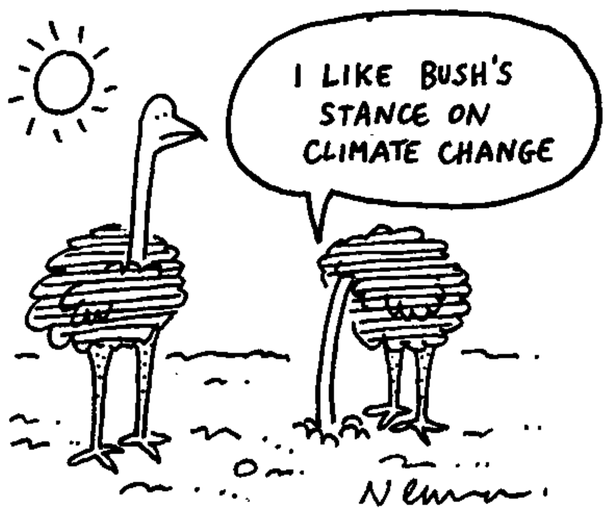
THE RAF's decaying fleet of Nimrod "spy planes", exposed in Monday's BBC *Panorama* investigation, are not the only aircraft close to being unfit for purpose.

According to insiders, the entire RAF air transport (AT) fleet is barely able to get off the tarmac, even though it remains in constant service.

Most AT fleet aircraft, including the nine secondhand Tristars given up for dead by British Airways decades ago and now relied on as troop transporters or refuellers, are more than 30 years old. Some of the VC10s based at RAF Brize Norton and doing similar work are even older.

So far, thankfully, there have been no fatalities – just an endless catalogue of "incidents". There are routine delays due to engine failure and there have been at least three aborted landings due to problems with brakes on the Tristars (half of whose fleet is on the ground at any one time being cannibalised for spares).

Meanwhile Tony Blair continues his global farewell tour in a brand new British Airways Boeing 777 – far more reliable and less likely to crash than any of the RAF's ancient crates.



Fully comprehensive

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OLD JOKES REVISITED

THANKS to a concerted cover-up, Gordon Brown looks set to make it to No 10 without the most embarrassing skeleton in his No 11 cupboard being exposed: the big tax holiday he has given the UK's 112,000 "non-domiciled" residents.

Tackled over these tax breaks a month ago, Brown's mini-me Ed Balls told the Lib Dem shadow chancellor Vincent Cable: "Estimates of the tax foregone in the UK… by those not **domiciled** in the UK are not routinely made" and "no estimates have been made of the economic benefits to the UK from the retention of the **domicile** laws on taxation".

Whoops! Responding to an *Eye* request for recent calculations of the economic and fiscal effects of the rule, HM Revenue and Customs confirmed the information *does* exist. (It would be crass if it didn't). So Balls misled Cable; but the Treasury won't say if an apology is on its way.

Having admitted having the information, however, HMRC won't now divulge it because to do so would "lead to less robust policy development". Yeah, right.

In fact "non-dom" tax exemption saves the mega-rich billions. The last figure released showed that in 2003 "non-doms" were saving around £1bn a year; and use of the ruse has multiplied since then.

The benefits to Britain of hosting more billionaires and bankers are uncertain. But sometime socialist Brown – who has received campaign donations from prominent non-doms – wants to keep them happy without revealing the size of their subsidy. So much for his promise of more "open and accountable" government.

AS REVEALED in the last *Eye*, there has been a blizzard of deletions from Alastair Campbell's diary before publication next month, mostly to avoid embarrassing Gordon Brown. But according to Andrew Rawnsley in the *Observer*, the Vicar's barrack-room language will also be bowdlerised.

"Blair was horrified at the thought that the ruder side of his tongue was going to be exposed to the public," he wrote. "Campbell has been prevailed on to tone down the swearing, including the occasion when the Prime Minister used the c-word about a very senior party figure from the Eighties who has been highly critical of New Labour."

Why not admit that Blair described Lord Hattersley as a cunt? Rawnsley's coyness in naming names is surely unrelated to the fact that Hattersley writes a weekly column for the *Observer*'s sister paper, the *Grauniad*.

WHICH nincompoop at Leeds Mental Health Trust decided to designate the "flagship" Becklin Centre (*Eyes passim*) as a "place of safety" under section 136 of the Mental Health Act?

This section allows the police to remove people suspected of mental incapacity from a public place to a "place of safety": usually a police cell but sometimes a hospital – which is "a step forward", according to health bosses.

But how "safe" is the Becklin Centre?

As regular *Eye* readers will know, under the trust's PFI contract, to save money the centre wasn't built to hospital fire safety standards and independent experts have proclaimed its building "unsuitable for patients with mental health problems".

A number of patient deaths in the new building have also caused alarm: one suicide victim lay undiscovered in a bathroom for four days, prompting the Leeds coroner to question levels of care at the centre.

More recently a patient died when his clothing caught fire (*Eye 1180*). In the wake of this death (and despite the trust's claims to have sorted out the fire safety problems) West Yorkshire Fire Service had to issue enforcement notices to the trust and its PFI partners for numerous breaches of... the fire safety regulations.

LOOKALIKE

DAMIEN HIRST claims the inspiration for his £50m diamond encrusted skull was Inca skulls he saw while visiting Mexico. But he needn't have travelled so far. He could see numerous look-alikes for his creation at West End fashion jewellers Butler and Wilson.

Staff at the shop have noticed the striking similarity of Hirst's work to their range of glittering skull jewellery – which includes earrings, tie-clips (see picture) and even a bridal tiara – which has been on sale for the past year and a half.

Hirst made a "goodwill payment" to a children's toy designer after toy makers Humbrol claimed that his 2000 statue "Hymn" breached the copyright on their children's anatomy set. And in 2003 a mathematician claimed that a pattern of circles Hirst submitted to a charity colouring book was identical to one in the *Penguin Dictionary of Curious and Interesting Geometry* (*Eye 1086*).

MAN IN THE EYE

ANDY COULSON

ANDY COULSON's arrival at Conservative HQ should at least bring one long-running mystery to an end: exactly what drugs David Cameron took while he was at university.

Questions on the topic are presumably now welcome given that the party's new director of communications decreed in October 2005 that: "Politicians make the laws. That's why we have the right to ask about their background when they aspire to run our country."

We have a right to ask about Andy Coulson's background, too. Lest we forget, he resigned the editorship of the *News of the World* back in January following the conviction of royal editor Clive Goodman for illegally tapping the phone lines of senior royal and political figures, as well as numerous celebs.

Coulson didn't resign immediately that Goodman pleaded guilty, mind: he did so a good two months afterwards, on the eve of a Press Complaints Commission inquiry into the affair – an inquiry which he neatly side-stepped, the watchdog concluding that since he was now unemployed, he was "no longer answerable to the PCC, whose jurisdiction covers journalists working for publications that subscribe to the self-regulatory system".

When Coulson was still answerable for his actions, he at least admitted that he took "ultimate responsibility" for Goodman's activities – but he also maintained that he had known nothing about them. Given that he was paying a weekly retainer of more than £2,000 to Goodman's co-bugger Glen Mulcaire, this means Coulson was hopelessly incompetent.

David Cameron, however, seems to believe that "Andy will make a formidable contribution as a senior member of my team in building the most effective strategy and operation to win the next general election". If nothing else, this at least proves Cameron was serious about that "letting sunshine win the day" optimism stuff.

Several commentators have speculated that in hiring Coulson, Cameron hopes to get his former boss Rupert Murdoch on side too. Given the reaction of Murdoch's papers to Coulson's appointment – the *Times'* headline referred to him as "Editor in phone-tap scandal" and his former friend (and victim of Goodman's phone tapping) Rebekah Wade gave him scant space on page 2 of the *Sun* – this would not appear to be guaranteed.

Notably, Coulson is one of very few *News International* ex-editors not to have been found a sinecure somewhere else in the Murdoch empire. But even with the best contacts in the world, a full U-turn from Murdoch's current position, with *Sun* editorials describing Gordon Brown as "a colossus" whose "intellect and breadth of administrative experience cannot be matched" and the man himself declaring that Cameron "seems to be all about image... a lot of almost throwaway positions", seems unlikely. Certainly there was no sign of a reverse gear in his old paper's editorial column the weekend following his appointment. Cameron was pointedly described as "shambolic", "delusional", "cavalier, arrogant and insulting".

Still, former tabloid hack Alastair Campbell did wonders for "new" Labour 13 years ago before everyone hated him and refused to believe anything a spin-doctor said, so it might be worth a go. And the mere fact that while Campbell was penning fiercely pro-Labour copy as political editor of the *Daily Mirror,* Coulson was enthusing over Take That as editor of the Bizarre column on the *Sun* should not necessarily disqualify him from a job as a political strategist. Gordon Brown has declared that the public are sick of celebrity and spin; so it makes sense for the opposition to take a contrary role. And if all else fails, at least Coulson can probably persuade B*Witched to have their photo taken with his new boss...

That Coulson Job Interview

STREET OF SHAME

"SOME feel the city has never been the same since... the first easyJet flight from Britain landed at Tallinn's airport," noted Leo Hickman, the *Guardian*'s resident ethical expert, on 21 May as part of his ongoing quest to find new things for readers to feel guilty about.

"The state airline, Estonian Air, soon dropped its prices to compete. But since Tallinn became cheaper to reach it has joined the ranks of European cities that each weekend have to deal with sometimes hundreds of drunk, leery men, singing and stumbling their way from bar to strip club in search of alcohol and sex," he observed, adding that the tourist trade had given a "veneer of acceptability" to the evils of people trafficking and venereal disease.

Sounds enticing? The paper certainly seemed to think so. Two days later it ran an exclusive Reader Offer: "Tallinn, Riga & Vilnius: 7 days from £599pp – return scheduled flights with Estonian Air from Gatwick to Tallinn."

"THE residents of Dolphin Square, the warren of apartments in Pimlico which is regarded as London's smartest housing estate, are aquiver with excitement after being told that Prince William is to move into the building in what will be his first bachelor flat," Adam Helliker reported in the lengthy lead item of his *Sunday Express* diary on 27 May.

He added: "The announcement that the prince will shortly be moving into a newly refurbished three-bedroom flat in the monolithic Thirties block has appeared in the Dolphin Square newsletter, *Tenant Times*."

And indeed it did... on, er, 1 April. Helliker – "the man who knows the people you'd like to know" – presumably failed to notice the significance of the date because he only stumbled across the spoof eight weeks later.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"HOUSE PRICE BOOM OVER?"
– Daily Mail *front page, 31 May*

"HOUSE PRICES STILL SOARING"
– Daily Express *front page, 31 May*

HOW JOURNALISM WORKS

"Only a moron would find David unsexy. What is sexier than a gorgeous, gifted man who loves his wife and his country? Nothing, says writer Muriel Gray." – *Mail on Sunday*, 30 June 2002.

"Do you think I'm Shreksy: He's the ugliest character in Hollywood, but Muriel Gray thinks Shrek is the man of every girl's dreams." – *Mail on Sunday*, 6 June 2004.

"I don't really fancy Shrek. Or David Beckham. That was just the *Mail* giving me lots of money to write those articles." – Muriel Gray, Observer, 27 May 2007.

YET another round of job cuts at the Independent News & Media titles in Britain and Ireland should have helped towards the board's stated aim of "achieving the low cost operator status" in the industry.

But such frugality does not extend to the boardroom, where the annual report reveals that pay and bonus packages of its five executive directors climbed by 18 percent last year – from £3,987,000 to £4,715,000.

IN&M's chief executive, former baked beans tycoon Sir Anthony O'Reilly, himself trousered a miserly £1,231,000.

More Street of Shame ☛

"CLAMPER CLAMPED," shrieked the *Mirror* on 23 May over a picture of what it called "a scene to cheer up motorists everywhere... A traffic warden's white vehicle is hoisted into the air after cheekily parking in a bus bay. But while it was being fastened down, the traffic warden took his revenge – booking the tow truck because it was on a double red line."

Chuckles all round – except for NCP, the company that owned both vehicles, which bemusedly pointed out to the paper that what it actually had was a shot of a broken-down van being delivered to a garage for repairs after it failed to start at the vehicle pound.

Not desperately funny – but the paper nonetheless insisted that a crowd of onlookers "clapped, cheered and laughed as the bizarre episode unfolded... One witness said 'it was highly amusing'."

VOLCANIC recriminations in the *News of the Screws* newsroom followed the announcement by the Crown Prosecution Service that it was applying for the arrest and extradition of Andrei Lugovoi for the murder of Alexander Litvinenko.

A mere two days earlier, under the headline "EXCLUSIVE. Spy Murder: No Charges", *Screws* crime editor Lucy Panton had revealed that "Foreign Secretary Margaret Beckett has blocked charges over the murder of ex KGB spy Alexander Litvinenko – to avoid upsetting the Russians... Her stance has angered police and CPS officials – and has halted any further moves in the case until Gordon Brown's new administration takes over."

"It symbolises the London Olympics – unfinished, overpriced and a complete mess"

THE *News of the World* was at the head of the queue to lambast council tax officials who have been photographing and compiling data on private houses.

An editorial at the end of May condemned "a stealth army of town hall snoopers... the spies are even buying up details on the sly from cash-grabbing estate agents... Remember when Britain was a free and fair land? Now it's becoming a sneak's paradise."

While it's wrong for public officials to buy up a homeowner's details on the sly, it is of course perfectly acceptable for the *Screws* to pay more than £100,000 to a private detective who helped its royal correspondent tap into the personal phone records of, among others, the heir to the throne. Nice to get that sorted.

"BEN Schott's Beatles Miscellany", shrieked the front page of the *Times* on 2 June, advertising its four-page pull-out-and-keep special featuring a plethora of facts about the 40-year-old LP Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band.

A brave commission, given that *Schott's Original Miscellany,* the volume that made Schott famous in 2002, gave the release date for Sgt Pepper not as 1967 but 1971, a year after the group had actually split up. "I got about 700 emails in the first half-hour of publication," he ruefully admitted.

A SLAGGING OFF FROM THE GLENDAS

TWENTY-SEVEN days into the search for Madeleine McCann, with the efforts of the Portuguese police trashed, local resident Robert Murat comprehensively character-assassinated and every possible photo-opportunity squeezed for as much coverage as it could provide, the UK media decided it needed someone new to blame...

"Can events surrounding the disappearance of Madeleine McCann become any more mawkish? I'm afraid the only answer is yes. Following the candles, vigils, public prayers and endless appeals, this week's meeting with the Pope by Gerry and Kate McCann smacks of opportunism by the Catholic Church and misjudgment by the parents. I don't think the public, on whose goodwill the McCanns are prevailing, will be entirely thrilled that the couple have left their remaining children in the care of relatives for their Vatican trip. And the large amounts of money pouring into the Madeleine fund coffers makes others feel uncomfortable. 'They've got £2m now. Maybe next time they'll shell out £20 for a babysitter,' a reader wrote to me this week."

– Jan Moir, *Telegraph.*

"This is a piece that is almost impossible to write. It is an almost unutterable message to Kate and Gerry McCann, but I feel I must say it before it is too late: 'Please, Please, for your own sake and the sake of your missing daughter Madeleine, step off this speeding juggernaut of publicity for just a second'... I do feel the McCanns' sustained public agony is so intense it is becoming almost unwatchable... Take the retail billionaire Sir Philip Green, who lent the McCann's his private Gulfstream jet to take them to and from the Vatican – out of the goodness of his heart. I suppose we should be grateful the jet didn't have a Topshop logo on it... The public at large will grow weary of these orchestrated photo opportunities, and cynical about the parade of well-meaning celebrities who have offered their support..."

– *Amanda Platell, Daily Mail,* Thursday

"On Thursday, I wrote about the campaign to find Madeleine McCann. Within that piece I referred to Sir Philip Green lending his jet to help Gerry and Kate McCann with their hastily arranged trip to visit the Pope. In fact, Sir Philip's involvement emerged only because of the massed media following the case. I sincerely apologise to him and his family for any implication that the decision to lend the plane was anything but an act of pure kindness on their part. Sorry, Sir Philip."

– Amanda Platell, *Daily Mail,* Saturday

"HAVE YOUR SAY: Are the McCanns doing too much?"

– *Telegraph*

"Has all this goodwill turned into global blather?... The bigger the story has become, the less it seems to be about the fate of the child, than about her parents and the galaxy of celebrities who have placed themselves in their firmament... The campaign has attracted everybody on anybody's A-list, and now the parents' audience with the Pope has taken them to the very top, to the greatest celebrity on the planet."

– Beatrix Campbell, *Independent*

"When the McCanns' turn came, their audience lasted all of 30 seconds... At the inevitable press conference afterwards, held in the ambassador's residence, Mr McCann said of meeting the Pope: 'It was more personal than I could ever imagine'... They have no plans to return to Britain, but instead will visit Madrid, Berlin and Amsterdam to issue yet more pictures and appeals for information... On-the-spot from Rome, latest pictures timesonline.co.uk/europe"

– *Times*

"Please, let's stop all the nasty whispering about poor Kate and Gerry McCann..."

– Fergus Shanahan, in a 600-word piece detailing exactly what those whispers are, *Sun*

"I don't have a lot of time for celibate men in frocks but am quite happy to let them go about their business. As long as it doesn't impinge on mine. Unfortunately, the Catholic hierarchy has been much in evidence this week. Firstly the McCann family, surely crazed with loss, got to meet the Pope for 30 seconds and told the world it was 'all very personal'. I hope it helps them and their child, but it struck me as exploitative in the extreme."

– Suzanne Moore, *Mail on Sunday*

"Kate and Gerry... should be receiving overwhelming sympathy for the tragedy which has struck them. Instead, there has been a nasty groundswell of criticism that they should not have left Madeleine."

– Editorial, *Sunday Mirror*

"Suddenly, the cordon of respect and sympathy that has safeguarded them from criticism thus far was broken. It wasn't quite open season on the McCanns, but it felt like it. 'How different things would be if they were an inarticulate pair of chavs'; 'They are bad parents who left their children alone at night'; 'They've become celebrity junkies'; 'How did Kate find time to have her highlights done?'; 'Aren't they both a little too composed' etc. 'It's all got a little weird, now,' was one of the milder comments I heard while watching the Pope bless a picture of their daughter. I may be a paranoid papist, but there is a whiff of something rather unpleasant about this."

– Liz Hunt, *Daily Telegraph*

PS: Not every paper has given up on the mission to save the Portuguese justice system the trouble of trying and convicting Robert Murat (see *Trial by Fleet Street*, *Eye* 1185). "EXCLUSIVE: WE REVEAL PORN SECRETS OF MADDIE SUSPECT MURAT AND HIS WIFE", shrieked the *News of the World* on 3 June. Those "secrets" in full? Er, Dawn Murat, 41, once posed for some photographs wearing underwear and a pair of fluffy handcuffs. Robert Murat – her husband – was not there at the time.

A CUNNING PLAN

IF YOU want a rough idea how Gordon Brown has been controlling the domestic policy agenda for some years now, look at what is happening to the planning system.

Ever since John Gummer became Environment Secretary in the mid-1990s, the supply of "undeveloped land" to developers has been increasingly restricted – much to the outrage of economic policy wonks at the Treasury, to whom any interference in the right of business to build anywhere it chooses is anathema.

So the housebuilders, out-of-town retailers and the CBI have been spending small fortunes on lobbying, insisting they should be allowed free rein to lower house prices, provide cheaper goods and create jobs – something that was not notably achieved in the 1980s, when a lot of sprawling, traffic-fumed, badly-served Legolands sprang up around our major cities as the centres themselves decayed.

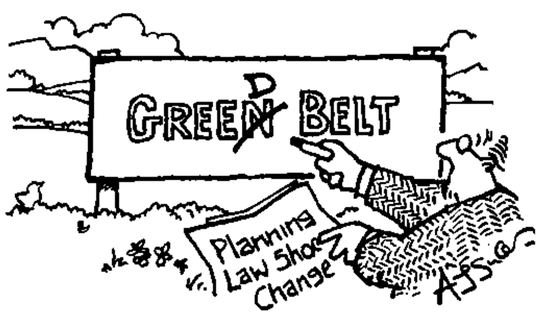
The chancellor responded by using his normal method for influencing policy in areas that don't immediately appear to concern the Treasury: ordering an external adviser to conduct a policy review which, oddly enough, ends up reflecting almost exactly the views of Gordon Brown and the Treasury.

In the case of planning, Kate Barker – an economist with a CV that included a long stint at the CBI, one of the planning system's main critics – was commissioned, firstly to review housing supply and, more recently, the planning system itself. It was no surprise that an economist, when asked to examine a system designed to place curbs on economic development, would conclude that it, er, placed too many curbs on economic development.

While John Prescott was in place it was hard for pro-free market reforms to be pushed through. He may have been startlingly incompetent as a minister, but at least he realised that allowing developers more freedom would be a grave mistake and he had the political clout to resist Treasury demands. With him gone, the recent planning white paper can happily state that councils must pay more attention to the "economic benefits" of new development, rather than simply turning down proposals from developers if they feel the economic and social effects are too grave.

Typical of this new approach is the suggestion that the "needs test" – the measure that allows councils to block new supermarkets on the basis that there is no need for extra retail space in their area – be removed. (This can be attributed almost entirely to Wal-Mart, which through its Asda arm has repeatedly argued that the current system prevents it competing with Tesco, which often has the only spot available in smaller towns. Like the competition commission's investigation, it is nothing to do with helping small shops).

Given that Brown's advisers seem to have taken over its work in deciding how England will look in years to come – planning is devolved in Wales and Scotland – the role of the Communities and Local Government department (prop: Ruth Kelly) seems to be shrinking. It now seems likely that major development decisions will be passed to an independent quango.



CALLED TO ORDURE

WAS that really the Secretary of State for Justice, Lord Falconer, telling MPs how his new Justice Ministry was born? Or was it a prolonged, richly satirical sketch from Channel 4's *Bremner, Bird and Fortune*? Falconer was so brazenly clueless and sweaty that it was hard to be sure.

Tony Blair's sometime flatmate was appearing in front of the Commons constitutional affairs committee. Its MPs are a brainy, lawyerly bunch. Just look how they had to declare their interests at the start of the session. Tory Bob Neill: "I am a member of the Bar." Tory Jeremy Wright: "The same for me." Labour's Keith Vaz: "The same for me."

Some people think it is wrong for MPs to have outside interests; but it at least means they should know what they are talking about in their own professional speciality. With complicated constitutional principle this is no bad thing.

The committee met to consider the new Ministry of Justice and any effect it might have on the independence of judges. The Lord Chief Justice, Lord Phillips, batted first. England's top judge barely bothered to disguise how pissed off he was at the way the ministry had been forced on him (and Falconer) by Home Secretary John Reid.

"Lord Falconer and I learned together, first of all, of the possibility that there would be a Ministry of Justice when we read the *Sunday Telegraph* on 22 January." He was referring to a story planted by Reid which announced that some of the Home Office's functions would be given to a new ministry. Phillips added: "At that point the Lord Chancellor had no inside information that there was going to be a Ministry of Justice."

MPs were amazed that, just five months ago, Falconer and Phillips had no idea about the new ministry. Yet by mid-May it was up and running. This has all been done to meet Tony Blair's "legacy" timetable.

Phillips & Co are unhappy because the Ministry of Justice will not just run courts. It will also run prisons. That will not only present a threat to court budgets. It may also, judges fear, result in political pressure being brought on them regarding sentencing and verdicts. You do not have to be a legal wonk to be alarmed.

When Falconer arrived for the hearing he cut a chaotic figure, collar and hair askew, spectacles slipping down his nose. He entered the room just as Phillips and his clerks were leaving. Falconer greeted them with much obsequious rotation of his hands, darting eyes and greasy salutations of "hi". Is that really how to greet a Lord Chief Justice?

Vaz asked Falconer if it was true he had only known about the Ministry of Justice's creation when he read the *Sunday Telegraph*. "I may have known the day before," said Falconer, as if pleased to have had such inside knowledge. "It was not government policy at the point it appeared in the *Sunday Telegraph* but having seen it in the *Sunday Telegraph*, the right thing to do was to discuss the possibility with the Lord Chief Justice. The discussions then became more detailed."

In other words: it was in the *Sunday Telegraph*... so there was no turning back!

Tory MP Andrew Tyrie was astonished that a process of "rearranging a large chunk of the machinery of government" appears to have started in the columns of a newspaper. "The first time it becomes public is in that article. I do not hear about it much longer before that," said Falconer.

Tyrie asked him why he had not told the Home Secretary to wait until the judges had been consulted. Falconer: "I spoke to the judges very quickly thereafter."

The committee's chairman, Alan Beith (Lib Dem), wondered if this was not a pretty feeble way to make policy. Falconer said he was "very, very committed to what is a successful Ministry of Justice". But is it really successful if it does not have the support of the judges?

Falconer, who airily insisted there was "not a great crisis here", asserted that he had long been an enthusiast for a Ministry of Justice – an idea which has been trundled round Whitehall from time to time (and consistently rejected, possibly with good reason) since 1919. However, in his old guise as Lord Chancellor he had a constitutional duty to speak up for judges if they were worried.

Vaz wondered if he truly would have opposed the Ministry of Justice if the judges had complained. Falconer, with a plump nod: "Most certainly."

Vaz: "And they never said this to you?" Falconer, without a blink: "They have never said this to me."

Why not? Because they (and Falconer) didn't know the thing was going to happen until it was announced by the Home Secretary in a Sunday broadsheet. If they had complained beforehand they would have been told there was no such plan. Now they are complaining after the event they are told it is too late!

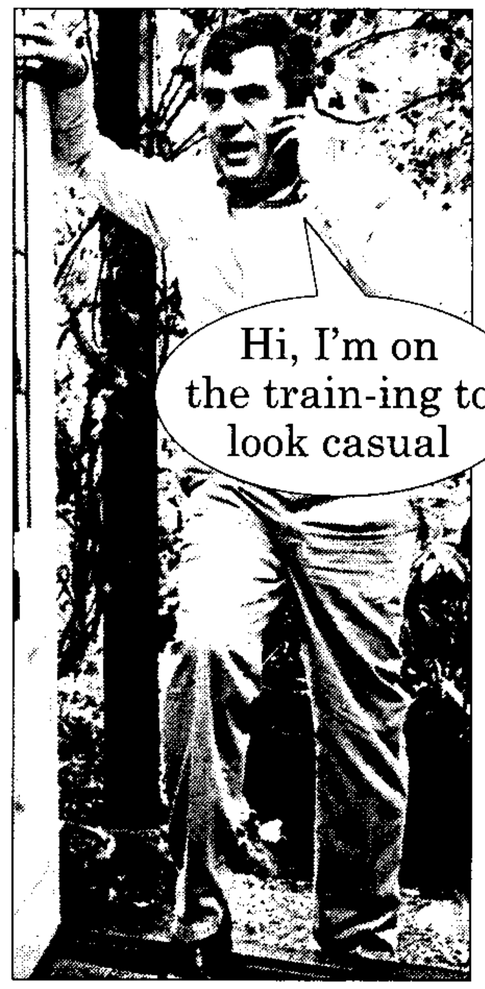
'Gavel Basher'

HARRIET HARMAN may be the bookies' favourite for the Labour party deputy leadership, with backing from housing minister Yvette Cooper, wife of Gordon Brown's confidant Ed Balls, but there appears to be a fly in the ointment.

The Transport and General Workers Union has thrown its weight behind her rival Jon Cruddas, with a £15,000 contribution to his campaign. This despite the fact that Harman's husband, Jack Dromey, is the union's deputy general secretary.

Of course, Dromey is also treasurer of the Labour party, and it was in this role that in March last year he declared himself unaware that Chai Patel, Barry Townsley and Sir David Garrard had given loans to the party totalling £3.5m in 2005, all three being subsequently nominated for life peerages.

Cruddas's campaign is unexpectedly winning support from many within the party who see the deputy leadership election as the only way to take a swipe at Blair as he departs. A matter that has doubtless been the cause of much animated conversation in the Harman-Dromey household.



NEW-LOOK BROWN

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

SO. *Adieu* then Tony Blair, who told voters he was going to put Britain at the heart of Europe to influence decision-making in Brussels.

Despite the spin, an investigation by the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies into how EU Council meetings work, suggests the reality has been rather different during the Blair years. The study found that, yes, the big three member states – France, Germany and the UK – normally get their way in council negotiations because of their greater resources and bullying power. But personality counts too; and here Britain has been losing out.

The authors, who interviewed 32 current and former heads of state, ministers and other high-ranking officials, found that Monsieur Tony's personality contributed neither "positively nor negatively" and that the vicar's impact had been "typically seen as less extensive than his spin doctors make it seem". *Quelle surprise!*

FRESH from one triumph of transparency – deciding not to require Brussels lobbyists to openly declare their interests (see *Eye* 1181) – the European Commission has started a consultation on improving public access to EU documents.

The consultation paper says great progress has already been made. The policy of webcasting some EU Council meetings – where EU member states deliberate – has been of "particular significance". Yeah, right. These "open" meetings are turgid affairs, consisting largely of monotonous readings of prepared statements. The real action goes on *in camera* and in the shadows.

As the Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies also found while dissecting Council workings, "proceedings are undocumented" and "participants are unusually hard to gain access to". So better access to documents will serve no purpose when... there are no documents!

SHORT memories at the Department of Culture Media and Sport when it comes to relationships with favoured lobbyists.

How often since 1997, Tory Theresa May asked recently, had the department's ministers met Sovereign Strategy, the firm run by former Labour European leader Alan Donnelly and home to ex-cabinet member Jack Cunningham?

Never, came the reply from minister David Lammy.

Really? A freedom of information request 18 months ago revealed that Sports Minister Richard Caborn met Donnelly twice in the preceding 12 months, swiftly followed up by correspondence between the two confirming a helpful interpretation of the new tobacco advertising ban for Sovereign's Formula 1 clients.

Yet another reason not to backtrack on the Freedom of Information Act – you can't rely on accurate government answers in parliament.

EUROPEAN Commission proposals to set up Rapid Border Intervention Teams (amusingly known as RABITs) gained media coverage when they were published in 2006 but little since, even though the Commission's blueprint has been modified in some rather alarming ways.

The draft talked about "experts" carrying "service weapons" who could "temporarily assist" member states having border difficulties. This has been modified by the EU Council to become an EU force of border guards who will go into action where there is a "mass influx of third country nationals".

RABITs will be armed for "self defence". Anyone unlucky enough to get shot will only have recourse where gross negligence or wilful misconduct can be proved – tricky in the middle of a "mass influx". The new draft also gives RABITs access to surveillance databases in the countries to which they are deployed.

Why the beefing up of the proposals? The prime movers behind the scheme are countries like Spain and Italy, who fear mass migration from North Africa. Factor in the growing realisation that climate change may make parts of Africa uninhabitable, and it doesn't take much imagination to see where the mass influxes might come from.

The UK's position is ambiguous. Normally Britain opts out of anything interfering with border control. But Britain wants RABITs and is even taking the commisson to the European Court of Justice after the commission said the UK couldn't join, on the principle that it cannot just pick and choose its opt-outs.

Why does Britain want in? A UK Brussels representation spokeswoman says the migration "phenomenon of the moment" is small boats arriving on Spanish and Italian islands. But the crises of the next five or 10 years are unpredictable and a "flexible instrument" is needed. Looks like the planning for Fortress Europe is underway.

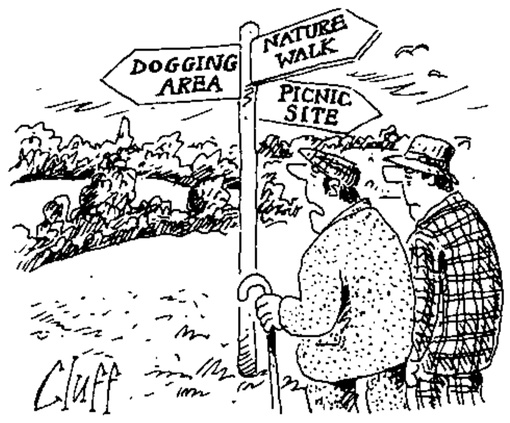
EU-phemisms

We're agreeing to drop the subject in return for dodgy oil deals

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Philip Hudson, the NFU's chief horticultural adviser, said that Poles and other east Europeans were now less interested in coming. 'Their standard of living at home has increased more rapidly than anyone could have projected so they are now staying at home'." – *Guardian*, 28 May

"In five countries – Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Malta and, surprisingly, France – increases in the minimum wage have failed to keep up with inflation. The result, the report admits, has been to encourage workers to quit low-wage countries for Britain." – *Guardian*, 28 May



"It's only diversification that's kept the farm going"

Down on the Farm

IN ALMOST every conceivable way, since it was renamed in the foot and mouth year of 2001, Defra has tried to live up its name as the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs. There has, however, been one shining exception to this impeccably consistent record.

As this column reported in 2003, Defra had carried out a study into the likely consequences of a demand from Brussels that every sheep and goat in the EU should have a plastic tag pinned into each ear, carrying its own individual 14-digit number. This would have to be recorded on the farm's paperwork, and each number would have to be recorded again each time the animal was moved off the holding or sold.

The idea was that Defra and the EU could keep track of every sheep (37m in the UK alone: way more than any other EU country), so their movements could be traced in the event of disease, such as a recurrence of foot-and-mouth. The practical problems this would cause were obvious. A big sheep market, such as Longton in Cumbria, can handle tens of thousands of sheep a day. This would require market staff to record millions of digits in a few hours.

Furthermore, the sheep do not much enjoy having plastic tags pinned through their ears and make painful efforts to get rid of them, as by rubbing their heads along thorny hedges. Around 15 percent of tags get lost this way each year, which meant that each time a farmer found that one or more of his sheep had lost its ID, he might have to roam over anything up to 50 square miles or more of moorland, rounding up all his animals and copying down their numbers, simply to discover which had gone missing.

The surprising thing was that Defra then carried out its own private study of how much all this would cost. Allowing three minutes for each tagging or check on a number, with labour costs of £12 an hour, Defra calculated that the basic cost of the EU scheme to the average UK sheep farmer would be between £13,000 and £16,000 a year. The average sheep farmer's income at that time was £11,136 a year. With 67 million "sheep movements" a year, copying out all those digits would cost £40m a year. The cost of replacing lost tags alone would be £14m. Additional costs, including record-keeping on the farm, would be £8m. Defra's figures showed that scarcely a single UK sheep farmer would be able to stay in business.

Even more surprising was that, armed with this evidence, Defra for once stood up for UK farmers, insisting to Brussels there was no way Britain could accept such a ludicrously unworkable and suicidal scheme. After tough talking, a heavily-watered down compromise was agreed, whereby sheep movements would only have to be recorded by "batch numbers", thus saving more than 90 percent of the costs.

Brussels does not, however, like to be thwarted in this way. Its Food and Veterinary Office now claims to have discovered so many failings in the cut-down system that the European Commission is determined to reinstate its original version. Discussions this month are likely to be heated. But if they go the wrong way, as is generally predicted, we can pretty well say goodbye to the British sheep industry which, for six centuries, ever since it was the foundation of Britain's prosperity in the 15th century, has been the largest in Europe. Such are benefits of EU membership. But at least sheep farmers in New Zealand will be grateful...

'Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THERE'S WALLEY

BEDFORDSHIRE county council's answer to the Scarlet Pimpernel, Cllr Paul "Where's" Walley (*Eyes passim*), has been found – by the Serious Fraud Office.

The former Tory councillor, now an Independent, was arrested as part of the spreading investigation into BCC's "citizen services partnership" (CSP) scandal. Knacker has also found himself compelled to interview BCC's deputy leader, Richard Stay, as a possible witness.

Cllr Walley's chat with Knacker ended a period of more than six months in which he was not seen by colleagues, other than attending one council meeting.

Knacker wants to know if he can throw any light on how several million pounds appear to have gone awol from the flagship IT fiasco, which was meant to put internet access into public phone boxes but folded suddenly last year. Cllr Walley, as former holder of the council's "customer services" portfolio, was supposedly in charge of the CSP.

He featured in *Eye* 1179 after attending just one BCC meeting in six months but claiming £20,000 in allowances and expenses. During that time he also came under investigation by the Standards Board (failure to pay council tax) and was booted out of the Conservative party (failure to pay his subs).

Walley has been released without charge as the SFO investigation broadens. Cllr Stay chaired the aptly-named CSP "oversight committee", which signally failed to spot the accounting anomalies. He currently holds, er, the council's finance portfolio.

CRAP IN HAND

LAMBETH Council is a glutton for punishment – how else to explain why it has allowed Capita back through its doors?

Crapita took over Lambeth's housing benefit (HB) service in 1997 in a 10-year, £48m contract. Four years in, with a 55,000 backlog of claims and hundreds of tenants made homeless thanks to Crapita's failure to process HB claims on time, the contract was torn up, costing Lambeth £18m.

Soon after, Labour lost control of the council to a Lib Dem/Tory coalition. But last year voters in Lambeth bucked the national trend and Labour regained the town hall. Now the new ruling group has done what many thought unthinkable... handed back a large chunk of the HB service to... Crapita!

In the last six weeks Crapita has been handed 40 percent of all HB claims in need of processing. The result has been all too predictable, although a council spokesperson said "minor problems" were expected with any new arrangement. Sound familiar?

ALL WASHED UP

SCHOOL swimming lessons in Tamworth, Staffordshire, were left high and dry after the town's main sports complex closed suddenly in May. Tamworth borough council sold Peaks Leisure Centre to Sawley Cross Properties for just £1 last autumn – provided that the firm maintain swimming facilities for at least three years.

Unfortunately for Tamworth's young swimmers, Sawley Cross appointed a manager with a failed sports complex and bankrupt company behind her. (Marjory Issatt had tried to launch a sports centre with Olympic pool in Middlewich, Cheshire, in August 2005. Her firm, Midpoint Sports Ltd, went bankrupt owing £400,000 in December that year.) Six months in and Issatt is in hot water again. Tamworth council sent in bailiffs to recover unpaid business rates, and staff at Peaks have not been paid since March. The final straw for Merlion Capital Corporation Ltd, holding company for Sawley Cross, came when apologetic staff asked customers to leave and shut up shop – after twice being told the money was on the way. Merlion changed the locks and issued Issatt with notice that she was in breach of her lease.

The council distanced itself from the debacle, claiming it had no say in the appointment; but Labour and Independent members on the Conservative-run authority had to resort to the Freedom of Information Act to see the contract between the council and Sawley Cross. They also want to know why a public facility was practically given away when the council is sitting on an £11m underspend this year. Meanwhile Merlion must find a management team with the £500,000 that Peaks needs to bring it up to scratch. Until it does, the council's promise to ensure a municipal pool doesn't hold water.

● GOOD to see councils battling against the superhighway of smut. Foreign exchange dealers TorFX send regular dry-as-dust commentaries on currency movements to clients. Its email of 18 May gives the flavour: "Sterling is dropping again this morning after data showed an unexpected fall in retail sales in March... negative sentiment is still dogging the currency, leaving it vulnerable to further declines..." TorFX staff were surprised when Salford council's email system bounced this offering back on the grounds of "sexual" content. Analyst Jon Beddell looked at it up, down and sideways but failed to find anything profane – until he realised it was the word "dogging" that couldn't get through Salford's censorious firewall.

FINE MESS, STANLEY

CAMDEN residents who hoped for regime change when they booted Labour out last May are beginning to realise that in their Town Hall it has always been the officers calling the shots, not the elected members – currently a limp

coalition of Lib Dems and Tories.

The previous regime agreed to sell developers Argent a listed 1860s tenement block next to St Pancras station, known as Stanley Buildings, for around £3m. (Cinemagoers may remember it as a location in Mike Leigh's 1988 film, *High Hopes*.) But experienced local surveyor Ian Lerner said the valuation was incorrect and the council could have got £7m for it, given its pivotal position in plans to redevelop King Cross.

The issue went to the council's scrutiny panel, which prudently recommended another valuation of Stanley Buildings. However, the council executive decided to accept the officers' view that the initial valuation was "robust". The same officers told members that a new valuation would cost between £10,000 and £20,000.

Clearly not worth spending that much for a possible extra £4m!

A WIGHT MESS

HEADS may roll at last in the saga of the Isle of Wight's illegal £13m Undercliff Drive contract with engineering firm High-Point Rendel (*Eyes passim*).

The island council has concluded there is enough evidence for the director of regeneration and development Derek Rowell, legal eagle and deputy chief executive John Lawson and finance director Paul Wilkinson all to face disciplinary action.

The three are believed to have been members of an inner cabal of the council's "directors' group", responsible for sitting on damning external legal and consultants' opinions on the contract for nearly two years. The two documents were only dragged into the light in November last year.

The head of the group, then-chief executive Mike Fisher, who ducked out on early retirement last year, has pleaded the Fifth Amendment from the comfort of his fat-cat payoff and declined to cooperate with a probe into the scandal.

His three former senior colleagues have not been afforded that luxury and might feel constrained to fill in gaps left by Fishy's silence. They have been suspended for weeks while inquiries were carried out by an investigation committee of councillors, advised by outside lawyers. Also suspended have been head of engineering services Steve Matthews and highway services engineer Nick Gallen, whom investigators said obstructed their work.

Joining them last week were "programme lead for compliance" Bob Streets and purchasing manager John Spencer, making a total of seven top officials cast into outer darkness. County Hall is in a state of near paralysis due to their absence from crucial posts.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER

I JUST LOVE THE INVIGORATING AUTONOMY OF Wi-Fi ACCESS!
EVERY CAFE IS A CONFERENCE CENTRE, EVERY HOTEL LOBBY A MEETING ROOM. SUDDENLY THE WORLD IS OUR OFFICE!
RIGHT YOU TWO, THAT'S NINE HOURS YOU'VE BEEN IN HERE - NEXT TIME I'M CHARGING YOU GROUND RENT!
CAFE
Wi-Fi HOTSPOT

You have 12 votes, and I hope you will give me one.

CHAMBERS, Kaye Elizabeth	**X**

Bishop's Castle council election leaflet

TV

Big Brother 2007 (C4)
Diana: The Witnesses in the Tunnel (C4)

WHEN the regulator Ofcom was set up, there was much discussion about where its HQ should be: in the end, they settled for a block by London Bridge, giving the main broadcasters and indies the same kind of distance to travel from their central offices to have their knuckles rapped.

But, these days, it looks more and more as if the best solution would have been for the TV beak to set up home in the Channel 4 offices at Horseferry Road. It would save so much time and money in taxis and phone calls if the No 1 naughty-boy broadcaster could simply be called down the corridor.

Like someone being caught with a smoking gun in one hand and smoking pipe of crack in the other, C4 managed last week to be facing two sets of allegations simultaneously. No sooner had Ofcom insisted on a lengthy correction and apology for the last series of *Celebrity Big Brother* being read out at the beginning of this year's run of the non-celebrity parent show, than front pages were raging with the news that one of the warm-up programmes before **Big Brother** this week would be a documentary featuring photographs of the dying Princess Diana in the Paris tunnel.

Even given the current achievements of medical science, it seemed unlikely that Rupert Murdoch would live to see another British mainstream channel sleazier and more opportunistic than Sky One; but, if you believed the newspapers, he had now apparently achieved it.

In fact, as it turns out, the channel is only half bang to rights. There are many things wrong with **Diana: The Witnesses in the Tunnel**. For example, there's a script which can't avoid bathetic sentences such as: "The car roared in to the tunnel and in to history." There's also an incredibly annoying translation technique in which the French paparazzi who make up the bulk of the programme are dubbed into English, but in such a way that words which are similar in both languages – for example, "bizarre" – are left to be heard, creating an irritating echo effect. Some will also wonder whether the documentary's apparent aim of clearing the snappers of any bad behaviour at all on the night may be rather fanciful.

But, on the main charge made by the newspapers attacking Channel 4 – of including explicit pictures of Diana at the moment of death – the film is not guilty. The most potentially distressing sections of the back-of-car snaps are heavily masked on screen and indeed rather more fully than by some British papers and magazines which have used similar material. Indeed, in the end, this is a rather dull piece of special pleading on behalf of the paps.

This creates the fantastic irony that a TV programme defending the tabloid press against false demonisation has found itself falsely demonised by the tabloid press. On the other hand, this misrepresentation only happened because the channel's moral reputation is currently so low. And, this week, it reminded us why.

The Diana doc really isn't a reason for the network bosses to resign. But the bullying of Shilpa Shetty, and the subsequent attempt to cover it up, clearly were and the latest extension of the franchise does little to suggest a house put in order.

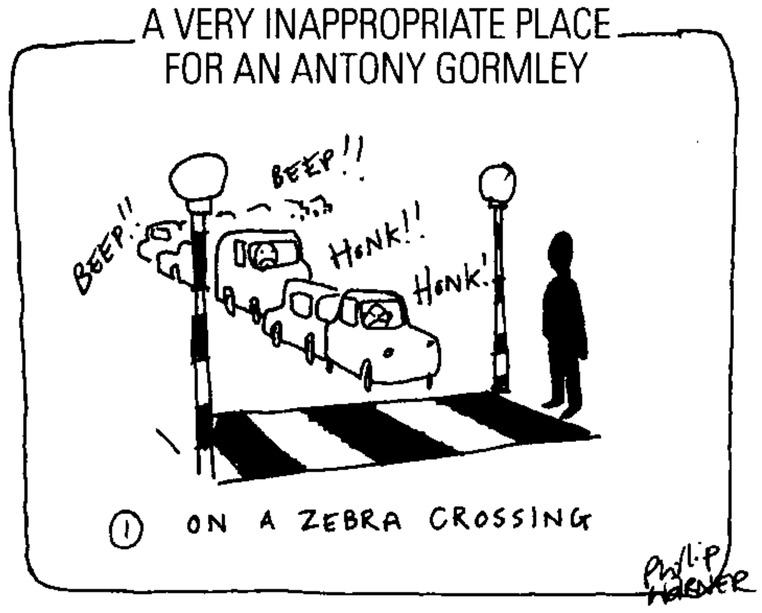
Big Brother 2007 is everything we feared it might be. The channel had just been found guilty by a regulator of screening racist material and seems clearly to have misled the media at the time about the existence of conversation involving Shilpa Shetty and "a word that rhymes with tacky." Many broadcasters in such circumstances would proceed humbly and cautiously with the latest series of the censured show. But not C4. The latest contestants seem as rough, rude and cast for nastiness as any that we have previously seen.

Although most of the show's recent problems were caused by gobby slappers, the producers decided to begin this time with a job-lot of shrieky gobshites in a completely female set of 11 initial contestants. These include Sam & Amanda, mouthy Scouse twins who are identical in everything including witlessness, and Tracy, who has a lip-stud and also apparently Tourette's. Plus Carole, a "divorced bisexual", who roars at the camera: "If you like an argument, here's the f***ing argument." And, showing the tacky narrow circularity of the celebrity culture from which the show emerged, there's inevitably one popsie convinced that she looks like Victoria Beckham and another who keeps getting mistaken for Peaches Geldof.

A 60-year-old posh lady, Lesley, who belongs to a branch of the WI near Highgrove and claims to be chums with Chas & Cam, has been cynically placed in the house to be humiliated as surrogate gran or mum to the pack of howling slappers. The producers would say that they are merely setting up class conflict. But remember that Channel 4 consistently tried to claim that the racist bullying of Shetty was a "culture clash."

Jeremy Isaacs, founder of Channel 4, once famously threatened to punch his successor, Michael Grade, if he betrayed the channel's standards. Grade got out un-thumped but, the way it's going, if Isaacs bumps into current C4 boss, Andy Duncan, he's going to need a chain-saw and a can of petrol.

'Remote Controller'



MEDIA NEWS

EYEBROWS are already being raised at the BBC over the BBC Trust's decision to approve a contract with Peel Holdings for a broadcasting centre in Salford – effectively committing the public service broadcaster to its "MediaCity:UK" private development in Manchester.

Peel Holdings owns a number of airports, several lucrative port facilities and has 25,000 acres of land for development, with substantial telecoms and advertising interests.

The developer also owns wind farms, including one near Manchester that was bitterly resisted by local people but was described by the BBC – just as it was negotiating the deal with Peel – as forming "part of the government's attempt to meet its climate change commitments and build reliable energy supplies".

Any conflicts of interest when it comes to reporting issues of any kind will, of course, be declared immediately.

HATS OFF to Sky News presenter Sasha Qadri, who reported the death in Afghanistan of a soldier from the 1st Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment.

According to Qadri, this was a sad loss for the Royal Anglican Regiment.

"SUCH an about-turn raises questions about the Jamaican handling of the investigation of Bob Woolmer's death," opined BBC sports editor Mihir Bose stating the bleeding obvious when it emerged that the Pakistan cricket coach was almost certainly not murdered by crazed match fixers.

This is something of an "about turn" for Bose himself, who commented so confidently on "the dreadful murder of Bob Woolmer" back in April.

OH, YEAH? Channel 4 has been accused of relying too heavily on the series, but it argues that, since 2000, Big Brother has become as much a part of the British summer as Wimbledon. – *The Times*

DUMB BRITAIN

The Steve Yabsley Show, BBC Radio Bristol

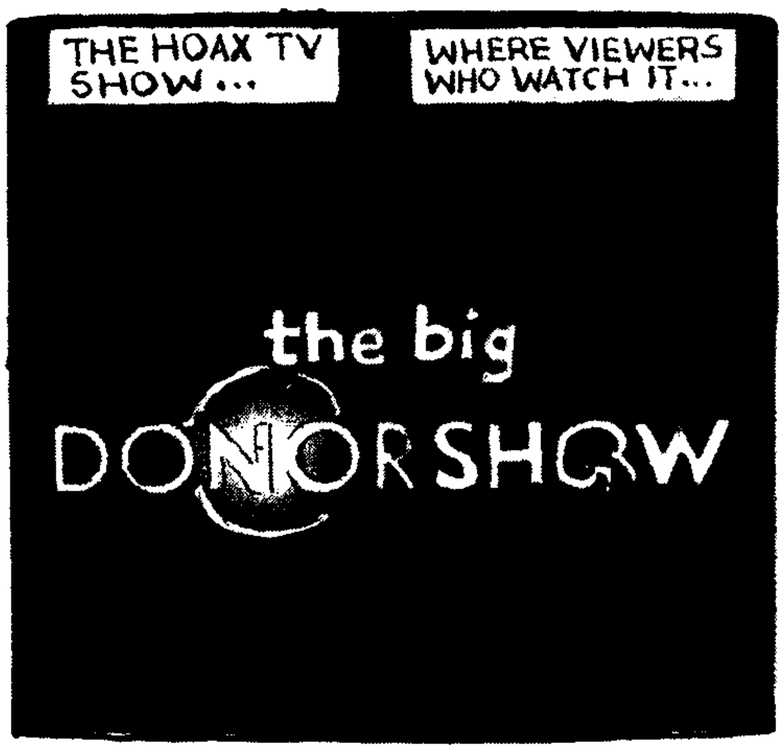
Yabsley: Which book by Graham Greene was set in Brighton?
Contestant: Fawlty Towers?

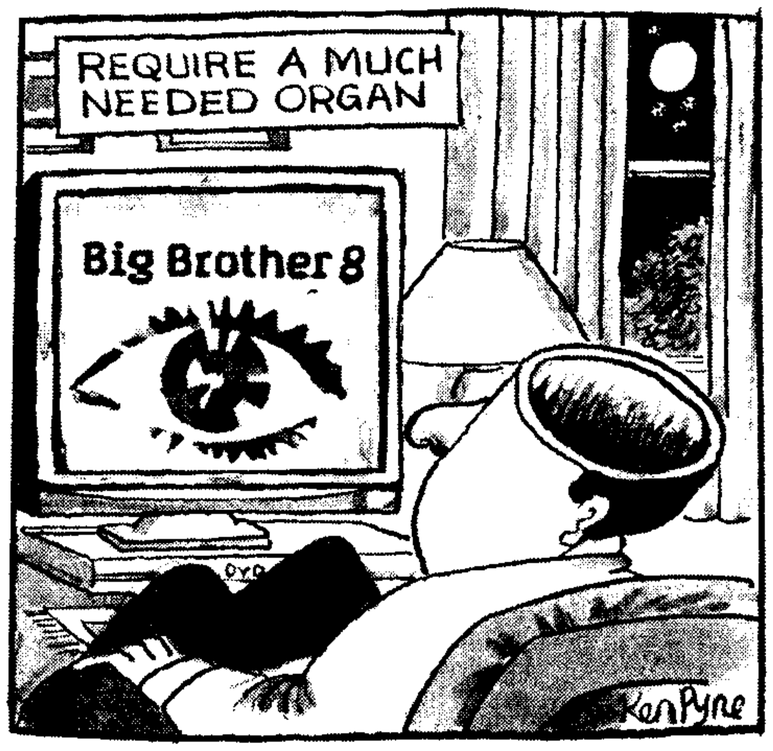
LBC 97.3, London

Alison Bell: In which Devon resort was Fawlty Towers set?
Contestant: Cornwall.

Sun FM, Sunderland

Presenter: What is the capital of Cuba?
Caller: Ermmm.....
Presenter: Take your time.
Caller: Ermmm...
Presenter: Go on, have a guess.
Caller: Is it Belgium?
Presenter: Er, not quite.





Number crunchings

14 ■ number of countries where Amnesty International has concerns about lack of freedom of expression in universities

1 ■ number of countries to be boycotted by the Universities and College Union (Israel)

COMPOSERS whose music is used in daytime and children's television face a significant pay cut thanks to the Performing Rights Society's decision to create a new payment weighting for "primetime" TV.

The lucky few whose music is played between 6pm and midnight will be paid more, but in order to pay for this, daytime payment rates will drop.

The PRS's decision to drop the classical subsidy in 2003 caused outcry (*Eye 1180*), but this time the organisation's board has been even more high-handed. There was no ballot of members, just a memo informing them of the change with a set of "frequently asked questions" and examples.

These show that a "music minute" on Channel 4 currently pays £18.80 at any time of day. By 2009, reckon PRS, a primetime minute will pay £30.40, but a non-primetime minute gets just £15.20.

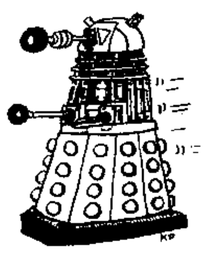
At the website www.composersforafairdeal.com both eminent composers and hit songwriters have joined a petition against the scheme. The PRS AGM later this month is likely to be more discordant than usual.

SO MUCH for a recent survey at BBC Scotland asking how happy staff are with plans to relocate from Glasgow's leafy West End to the wastelands of Govan.

According to the in-house rag *PQ News*, "97 percent of staff understand the changes in BBC Scotland, and 89 percent feel positive" about them. "We're getting there," the paper concluded, noting a new spirit of collaboration.

Whoops! Just 66 staff out of 350 responded to the emailed questionnaire sent in April, suggesting the Beeb's corporate optimism may be misplaced. A 19 percent response rate to an in-house survey? It wouldn't cut the mustard on *Newsnight*…

BIRTSPEAK 2.0



LESLIE MOONVES, president and CEO of CBS Corporation, said: "Last.fm adds a terrific interactive extension to all of our properties and also is a huge step in CBS Corporation's overall strategy of expanding our reach online to transition from a content company into an audience company."

"We looked at a lot of companies to provide a base for CBS's investment in online reach, and found Last.fm to be poised at an inflection point – balancing fast growth, a sticky community and the opportunity for monetization that does not distract the user," said Quincy Smith, president, CBS Interactive.

– CBS press release

SO delighted were *Daily Express* executives with the acres of pink flesh in the *Guardian*'s 31 May feature on young naturists that they bought the piece lock, stock and barrel to run in their own paper the very next day.

There was, however, one important difference. While the *Guardian* displayed several male nudists in their full, dangling glory, not so much as the smallest hint of penis graced the pages of the *Express*.

By way of compensation, that night the paper's sister TV channel, Television X, featured one of its most popular programmes: *Superdick*.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"My guest this week is Britain's best known hypnotist and made his name on prime-time TV. Millions used to watch on Saturday nights as he mesmerised ordinary people into doing extraordinary things. But he has found an even larger audience – and riches to match – through his series of self-help books. With titles like *I Can Make You Thin* and *Change Your Life in Seven Days*, he taps into the angst-ridden preoccupations of our age with promises of serenity, contentment and control."

– Kirsty Young, Desert Island Discs, *BBC Radio 4, 27 May*

"'I lost weight long term and re-established a relaxed relationship with food. I honestly believe diets don't work. Paul McKenna's method does!' – Kirsty Young."

– Endorsement on cover of Paul McKenna's I Can Make You Thin, *2005*

AD NAUSEAM

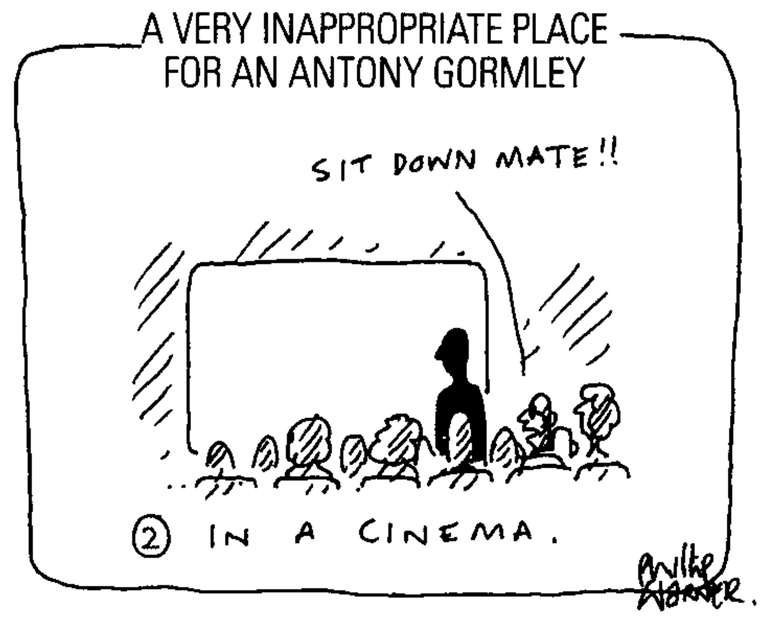
TRUE to its own "Try Something New Today" slogan, Sainsbury's forthcoming ad campaign will focus on a "Best of British" theme. This time Jamie Oliver will be out in the field talking to British farmers, the idea being that Sainsbury's supports local sourcing and fosters good relationships with Britain's trusty sons of the soil.

Ignoring that the whole routine piggybacks shamelessly on Waitrose's "Food from Britain" campaign (which has been running for six years), the *Eye* would welcome the thoughts of the British farmers who, apparently, fraternise so freely with their monolithic paymasters.

To judge by the words of NFU president Peter Kendall at this year's NFU conference, all is not so buddy-buddy. On the subject of dairy farming, he addressed Sainsbury's CEO Justin King directly:

"Justin this sector is in meltdown and we need action. Today's prices are not sustainable, and that also emphatically goes for the beef and sheep sectors as well. We as an industry want to engage with supermarkets to offer our customers the security and quality that comes with a UK supply base: but they must understand that the farming businesses that make up that supply base must be profitable." Kendell concluded: "This must not be about PR or about looking good because of consumer expectations…"

Lo and behold, three months later we welcome Sainsbury's new ad campaign.



LUVVIES

"When I sat down to read the scripts, I didn't move until I'd read all five of them – I didn't even get up for a drink," Julia says. "At the end I was speechless; it was as if someone had ripped my insides out. It felt like a lump the size of a fist inside my chest – what Claire must be feeling is beyond awful."

JULIA HAWORTH (Claire Peacock)
Coronation Street

Submitted by Mr A. Blair.

HIGHLIGHTS from the latest batch of Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) adjudications include an ad from Victor Chandler for its online poker site.

Chandler's poster, which went up in the gents at bars and pubs, ran, "You love sex. She loves sex. You love money. She loves money. You have money. She loves you. See how much you have in common?"

As anyone with a passing knowledge of the advertising codes knows, ads linking gambling with sexual prowess or riches aren't allowed, and so last week the ad was banned. But we enjoyed Victor Chandler's defence – that the ad, which featured a pouting woman, several links to the poker website and multiple repetition of the words "sex" and "money", was merely based on the idea that "everyone loves a winner".

"GORDON RAMSAY looks so Scottish… but he doesn't sound it," wrote Peter York in a gushing, 800-word *Independent on Sunday* profile of the chef.

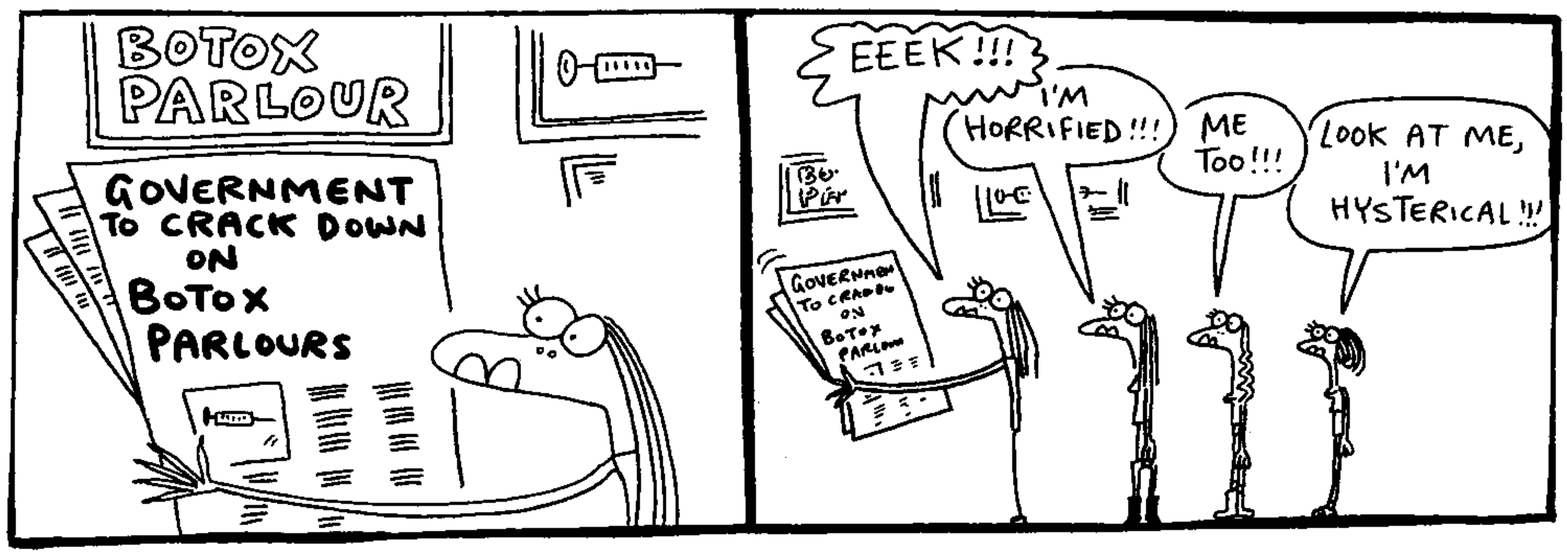
"What he says and how he says it sounds like pure Southern ambition, modern management strategy – creating a mass brand and rolling it out, letting people access it in different ways while keeping the whole thing profitably up-market."

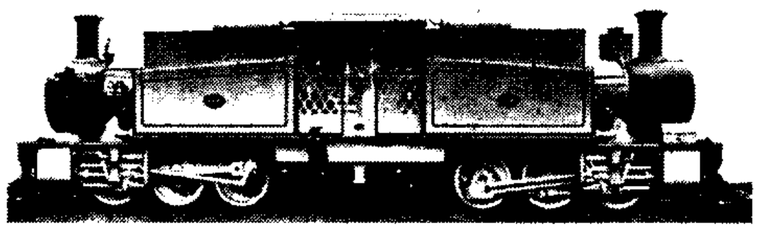
York's piece was inspired by Ramsay's appearance in a new BT advertisement.

Helpfully, the paper illustrated the piece by four pictures from an entirely different BT ad starring Kris Marshall.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER





SIGNAL FAILURES

Weatherproof bonuses

NETWORK RAIL bosses won positive headlines by deferring their bonuses, albeit reluctantly, until after the investigation into the derailment at Grayrigg in Cumbria. But did they deserve provisional bonuses in the first place?

The bonus regime is based on the company's performance; and NR admitted that train delays not caused by the train operators were the same in 2006-7 as the previous year. It's a strange incentive system if standing still merits bonuses as big as chief executive John Armitt's £112,000.

However, NR offloaded the blame for many of the delays caused by problems with NR's infrastructure and cited the weather. "Delays caused by external factors, such as the January storms, increased by 700,000 minutes," it said. But deduct those minutes and, abracadabra, "delays caused by infrastructure faults were reduced." Trebles and deferred bonuses all round.

Should weather-related problems really be classed "external factors"? When south-east commuter trains were halted by frozen points after light snowfall in January, NR blamed "extreme weather" but had obviously been surprised by temperatures falling below zero in midwinter (*Eye* 1177). The design and maintenance of tracks and stations aren't up to scratch if they're badly disrupted by gales, heavy rainfall or heatwaves. Climate change is predicted to make the weather more challenging for NR, but rather than weatherproof its assets, it seems to prefer the cop-out of blaming "external factors".

CIVIL servants in London have a clever new wheeze to minimise spending on stations. They reckon in future passengers will spend less time waiting at stations because they'll buy tickets online and get rail information over their mobile phones.

Out in the real world, meanwhile, many passengers find they spend *more time* waiting on stations. To simplify operations or franchises, direct trains between many pairs of provincial stations have been axed and more will follow when mandarins butcher Virgin Cross-country routes (*Eye* 1172). Thus more people are being forced to change trains and wait at dismal stations like Birmingham New Street.

The network's fragmentation causes more waiting because of missed connections, as train companies won't risk fines for holding back services to connect with delayed trains. To improve performance stats, late trains are often terminated early (more waiting at stations) or skip advertised station calls entirely, delaying waiting passengers even longer. Anyone arriving at a station platform a minute before departure time could find the train doors already closing and have to wait for the next train.

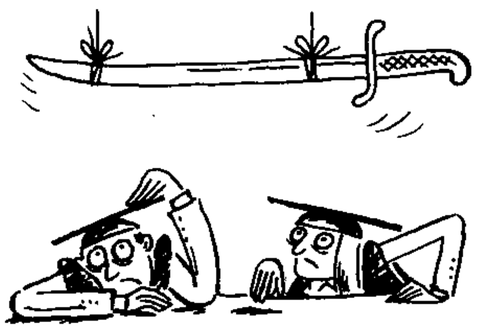
The failure to increase capacity forces passengers to wait at stations when they can't get on their intended train (see *Eye* 1167 for tales of holidaymakers left behind last summer). And it's not only inside stations that passengers now routinely linger: the wait for rail replacement buses happens in car parks and on roads outside.

EVERY DAY thousands of passengers wait at Crewe, a convenient hub at the intersection of six railways. Network Rail recently suggested a replacement station a mile further south, far from the town's bus and pedestrian routes but "with a big car park" just off the Crewe bypass. The idea is to get non-stop Virgin trains whizzing through at 125mph instead of 80mph, although trains from Stoke-on-Trent and Derby couldn't easily reach the new site unless NR built a new line.

It's reminiscent of a 1990s idea to replace Birmingham New Street station with a Heartlands station to the east. This came to nothing but distracted from inactivity on New Street's dire congestion.

Unlike New Street, Crewe station has bags of space. It could accommodate 125mph passing trains with some alterations. Cheshire council has led the planning for a £38m "gateway" upgrade of the station, car parking and access in 2009-11. Conditional government funding has been awarded, but now the council has put the scheme on ice because the spending could be a waste if NR proceeds with its new idea. NR has been a "principal partner" in the gateway scheme since 2003, so why has it set this new hare running so late in the day?

'Dr B Ching'



SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL?

FROM across the Atlantic comes another new wheeze to squeeze money out of struggling schools. The London borough of Enfield will pay American company Edison Schools £900,000 for a three-year "leadership package" for Salisbury School.

What it gets for its money is one highly paid, controversial headteacher and two "principal senior leaders". The headteacher provided for Salisbury School is Trevor Averre-Beeson, former head of Islington Green school, and two Edison-employed henchwomen who were also at Islington Green. On his website, Mr Averre-Beeson describes himself as a "leading consultant headteacher" and offers talks on school transformation. But is he – and Edison – worth the money Enfield is shelling out?

Research by Arizona State University (ASU) found that numerous school boards have terminated contracts with the company. In **Dallas**, seven contracts were scrapped in 2003 because achievement "did not pace gains made by students at surrounding schools". A school district in **Missouri** withdrew several contracts citing poor management. In **Florida** in 2005 a contract was ended because after eight years the school "still hadn't outperformed traditional public [ie state] schools".

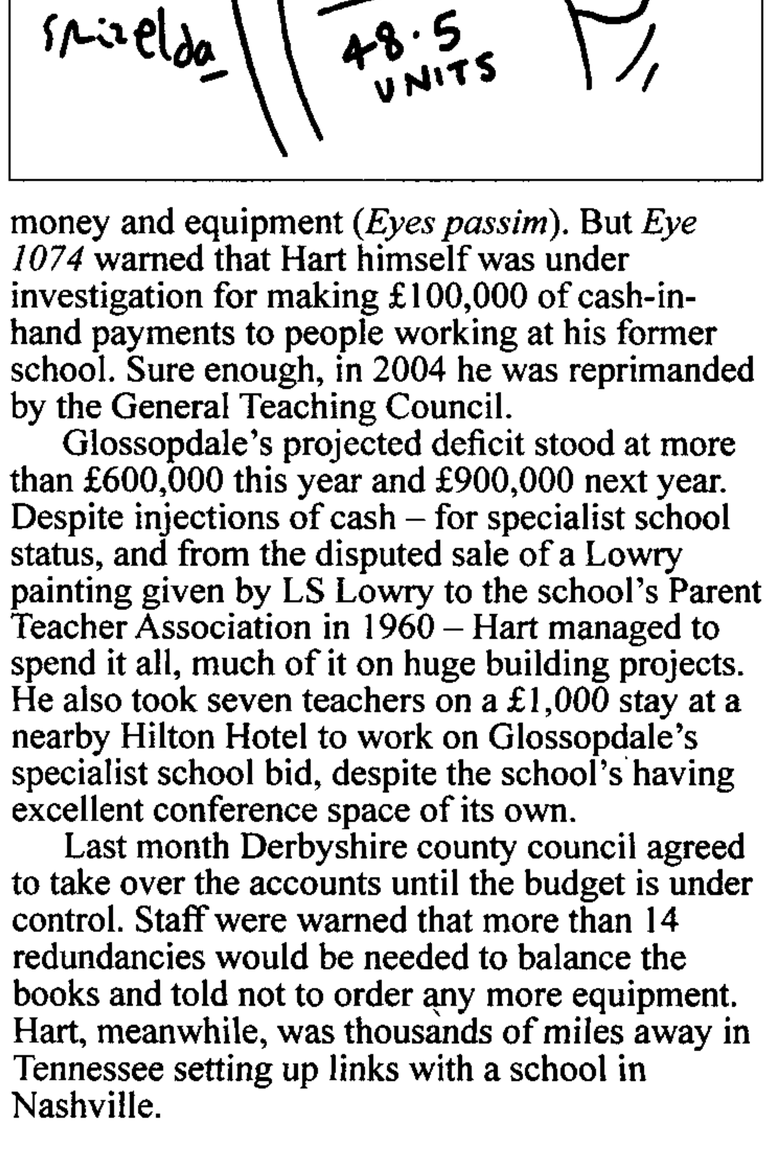
Researchers also noted that in **Pennsylvania**, Edison was being paid $4m a year to run Lincoln Center Charter School, with 690 pupils, and trousering $813,000 as profit from the deal even though the school's test achievements were unimpressive. In February the whole principle was called into question by results from **Philadelphia**'s four-year experiment in using private operators: the 45 schools run by private managers (including Edison) had done no better than those that were publicly managed. So, er, just the people to sort out Salisbury School in Enfield.

EDUCATION chiefs in Derbyshire have finally stepped in to curb the spending of John Hart, headmaster of Glossopdale Community College.

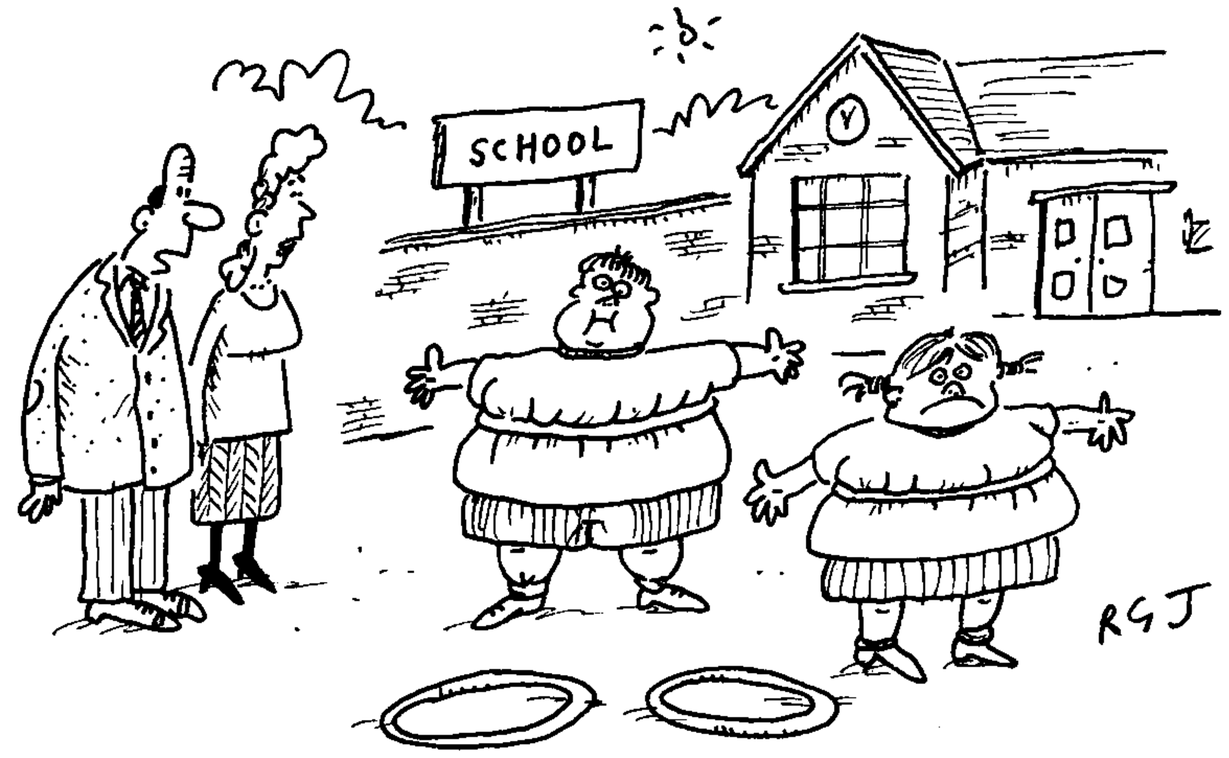
Hart was appointed in June 2002, replacing the disgraced Brian Lee who stole vast sums of money and equipment (*Eyes passim*). But *Eye 1074* warned that Hart himself was under investigation for making £100,000 of cash-in-hand payments to people working at his former school. Sure enough, in 2004 he was reprimanded by the General Teaching Council.

Glossopdale's projected deficit stood at more than £600,000 this year and £900,000 next year. Despite injections of cash – for specialist school status, and from the disputed sale of a Lowry painting given by LS Lowry to the school's Parent Teacher Association in 1960 – Hart managed to spend it all, much of it on huge building projects. He also took seven teachers on a £1,000 stay at a nearby Hilton Hotel to work on Glossopdale's specialist school bid, despite the school's having excellent conference space of its own.

Last month Derbyshire county council agreed to take over the accounts until the budget is under control. Staff were warned that more than 14 redundancies would be needed to balance the books and told not to order any more equipment. Hart, meanwhile, was thousands of miles away in Tennessee setting up links with a school in Nashville.



"I told you... Hula Hoops will never take off with modern kids"



NOOKS and CORNERS

MORE ON Liverpool's response to its elevation as European City of Culture next year. This time the victim is in Sir Thomas Street, a largely intact 19th century street off Dale Street in the city centre, right around the corner from the Municipal Buildings built by Liverpool Corporation in the 1860s.

No 6 Sir Thomas Street was a Late Victorian commercial building of red brick and stone once used as an education office. It lay between the former Municipal Annexe and the former City Education Offices, both listed grade II. Last year, in its unrelenting enthusiasm for redevelopment, Liverpool city council approved the demolition of No 6 to make way for an entrance to a new "luxury boutique hotel".

The developers, Iliad Koukash, claimed the different floor levels in the Annexe and the Education Offices made it impossible to retain the building. But conservationists, anxious to retain at least the façade of No 6, asked English Heritage to consider the building for listing. An inspector looked at the exterior on 1 March and arranged to inspect the interior two weeks later. This appointment was rearranged at the request of the developer to 5 April. When the EH inspector appeared, the ground floor windows and the handsome Classical doorcase had been deliberately damaged. As the interior had already lost all original features, No 6 could not be recommended for listing.

It's an old trick. Messrs Iliad claims the "damage" was part of demolition work already approved by the council. But, as the inspector reported, the damage occurred "prior to the developer completing and submitting a building recording required by the local authority". Not that the local authority could care less. No 6 Sir Thomas Street is directly overlooked by the office of the leader of the council, Warren Bradley. Did he not notice the premature vandalism? Apparently not.

TALKING of facades, it is now proposed that the long front elevation of the Newark Works in Bath, the former factory of Messrs Stothert & Pitt, is to be retained.

This industrial structure was designed in 1857 by Thomas Fuller, a local architect who went on to design the parliament buildings in Ottawa and became chief architect to the Dominion of Canada.

It was threatened with demolition to make way for the Dyson Innovation Academy designed by Wilkinson Eyre architects (Eye 1176). Happily, thanks to pleading from the Canadians, the Newark Works was listed, at grade II, last December, so Dyson and his architects had to think again.

They have now put in a revised scheme. While a smart new building by Wilkinson Eyre with a curved glazed front will face the River Avon, the front and back walls of the Newark Works will survive. But not unaltered: not only will a prominent asymmetrical structure of steel and glass rise above the stone front façade along the Lower Bristol Road, but the ground floor windows are to be enlarged downwards to create a sort of arcade behind which will run a pedestrian passage.

At present, the long elevations rise from a powerful continuous horizontal plinth of rusticated stone. This plinth will be repeatedly cut through - destroyed – to create the new openings. The character of the building will be entirely changed. At present the only door openings are in the office part of the façade, so there is a case for making another opening. But to alter every single window is to wreck Fuller's design. As the Victorian Society comments: "This level of demolition would be unacceptable and damaging."

Not that Bath & North-East Somerset Council will mind. Both councillors and planners seem so ashamed that Bath is famous merely as an historic Classical city built of beautiful stone and so desperate to bring it kicking and screaming into the 21st century they applaud and promote anything which is arrogantly discordant and "modern".

Hence the proposals to enlarge the city's Holburne Museum of Art in Sydney Gardens which have also been submitted for planning permission. The Holburne Museum is the former Sydney Hotel, a most elegant Palladian building of the 1790s which closes the vista down Great Pulteney Street. It was tactfully converted into a museum by Reginald Blomfield in 1913-16. But now it is run down and seems too small so the Holburne wants to expand. A large extension – almost as big as the existing building - designed by Eric Parry Associates, is to be built to the rear in Sydney Gardens to contain exhibition space and, of course, a café.

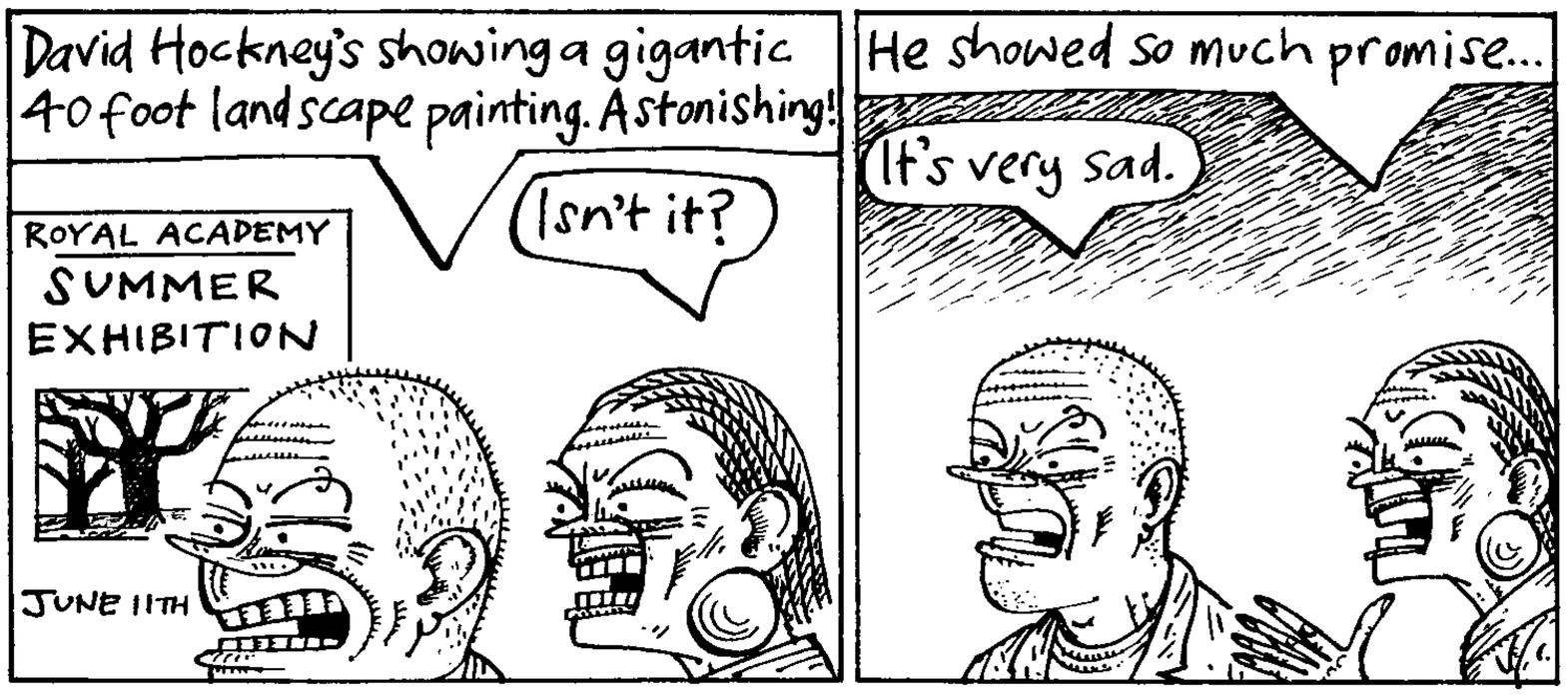
This extension doesn't cravenly try to respond to the existing Holburne Museum building. Rather it is a striking contemporary expression, articulated by a close rhythm of vertical fins and faced in glass and ceramic coloured blue or, rather, "cobalt over olive". Not a square inch of Bath stone to be seen: but why not?

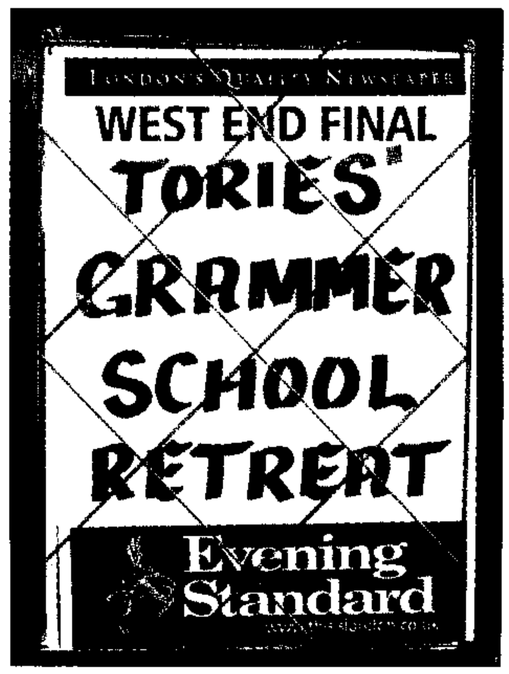
The strong local opposition has been dismissed as pathetic and reactionary, but to argue that glass and blue ceramic would be wrong and alien in this pastoral setting in a World Heritage Site is not necessarily to advocate a modern Classical design. After all, when the Great Western Railway was brought into Bath through Sydney Gardens by that Isambard Kingdom Brunel, he took care to separate the railway from the park by walls and balustrades of Bath stone and to design elegant bridges and tunnel entrances, again in stone. If Brunel could be tactful, why can't Eric Parry?

'Piloti'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH





I-SPY

South Kensington Station

Submitted by Max Barclay.

£10 paid for similar submissions.

(SAE required for return of photographs)

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

AS SIMON RATTLE said in a recorded message at a preview for the reopening of the Royal Festival Hall, it's fingers, toes and all other appendages crossed that the £111m lavished on refurbishing Britain's flagship concert venue will prove well-spent, the critical test being the new acoustic.

The Hall's sound has been flat and lifeless since it was built in 1951, and central to the whole refurbishment has been a plan to make it rich and resonant. We'll find out in a few days if that's worked (the first concert is on 11 June), but the signs aren't good.

The Hall has kept music critics and other scribblers well away from the acoustic trials, as though there were something to hide. And the recent shambolic press launch wasn't exactly encouraging.

From the number of workmen in hard hats, drilling, hammering and collecting water in buckets from where the roof had leaked, it was clear that building was still very much in progress. And not only were speeches from the South Bank grandees smothered by these noises off, they were wiped out by defective microphones and periodic intercom announcements asking everyone to leave the premises. "Just testing," laughed the South Bank chief executive weakly as the tannoy messages went on, and on, and staff ran around frantically trying to stop them. So much for the Hall's reinvigorated sound.

The truly worrying sign, though, came with the parade of musical celebrities dragooned in person and on film to say how wonderful the new acoustic was. Because they didn't, quite. Vladimir Ashkenazy made some roundabout supportive statements. But Tamsin Little could only "imagine" what it would be like with an audience. The young whizz-kid conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Vladimir Jurowsky, was all caveats and qualifications, stressing the need for "further adjustments" and time for the acousticians "to finish their work". And Simon Rattle said nothing whatever except that he was crossing fingers and wishing everyone the best of luck. Very encouraging.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

ST JOHN'S CHURCH CRAGG VALE
A MUSICAL EVENING
with
THE SHIPLEY MUSICAL UNION MALE VICE CHOIR
at 7.30pm on Friday 11th May 2007

Hebden Bridge Times

Kristine will be followed by the Illingworth Piano Trio who will interpret Beethoven's Piano Trio Opium One, Number One, as part of their programme.

South Manchester Reporter

Letters

A New Girl writes...

Sir,

I have never been a sympathiser of Baader-Meinhof, as stated in The New Girls (1184). I object strongly to any association being made between Baader-Meinhof and the Respect Party and/or myself, which is what I believe the article suggested. I am proud to be a member of the Respect Party, the GMB Union and of the Communist Party of Britain.

JOHANNA KASCHKE,

London, E2.

Maurice dancing

Sir,

Patrick Wilde slags the Eye (Letters, 1185) for "fuelling the ignorance and bigotry that makes many people... confuse and conflate homosexuality with paedophilia". How so? By a cartoon in which Lord Browne croons "Thank heaven for leetle boys" to his ex-lover Jeff Chevalier (1184). Mr Wilde points out that Jeff "is not a 'leetle boy' but a grown man." So too were the "leetle girls" in Maurice Chevalier's original song, the second line continuing "they grow up in the most delightful way"... as, presumably, did Jeff, until things turned ugly.

Yours,
ANDREW BIRKIN,

Via email.

Dead reckoning

Sir,

Jeremy Simpson (Letters, 1185) seeks to defend Lord Browne by (among other things) pointing out that the oil refinery explosion in Texas was "hardly a Piper Alpha". Presumably he feels that a tally of 15 avoidable deaths is somehow less contemptible than one of 167. I wonder how many deaths he thinks Browne, or any other chief executive, should be allowed to get away with?

Yours,
LUCY PEACOCK,

Granada, Spain.

Lookalike

Wacko

Amiel

Sir,

I have noticed a remarkable similarity between the somewhat eccentric songwriter/ singer Michael "Wacko Jacko' Jackson and the former newspaper scribe Barbara Amiel, now known as :Lady Black. Are they by any chance related? Brother and sister, perhaps?

Yours faithfully,
STEPHEN BRIGGS,

Litlington, Herts.

Piloti error

Sir,

Enjoy Piloti as much as I do, his description of the current architecture scene as "posturing egomania allied to grasping commercialism" (Nooks & Corners, Eye 1185) seems a bit of a contradiction. Surely these were the same driving forces that gave us such incredible commercial architecture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – such as The Three Graces themselves?

Yours from a 1980s semi-detached,
SEAN FIELD,

Via email.

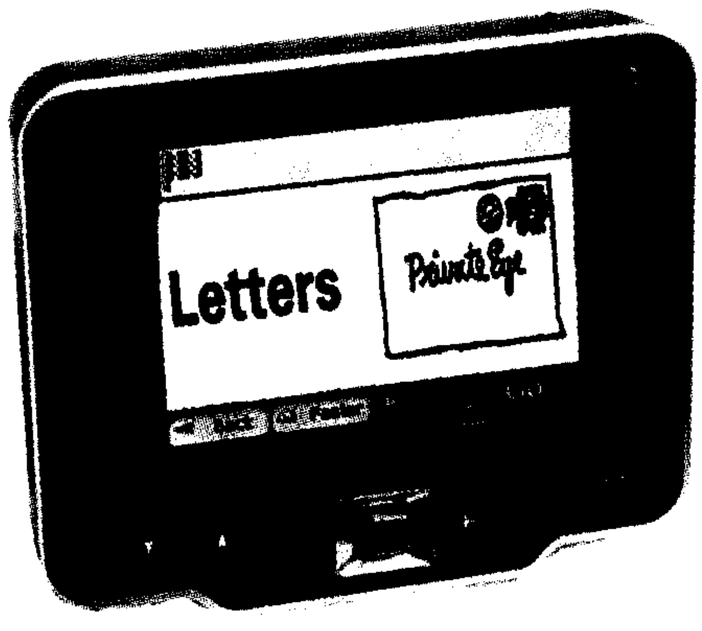
Very sat-irical

Sir,

Might I propose an obvious "Sat Nav" alternative you appear to have overlooked?

Yours respectfully,
PETE DUMONT,

Via email.



Twat Nav

Even more sat-irical

Sir,

Shame on you for treating your loyal subscribers to the kind of ironic humiliation

which you should preserve for those more deserving of your satirical barbs. I refer to your decision to sandwich Phillip Lickley's laudable attack on your proliferation of sat nav jokes between two pisspoor examples of the said genre (Letters, 1185). For my own part, I happen to be pig sick of your endless and juvenile recycling of embarrassing photographs of Messrs Neill and Opik with their respectively inappropriate totty. Let's see if you have the guts to treat another dedicated subscriber with the same contempt that Mr Lickley suffered.

Yours,
TONY KINSELLA,

Via email.

Joke fell flat

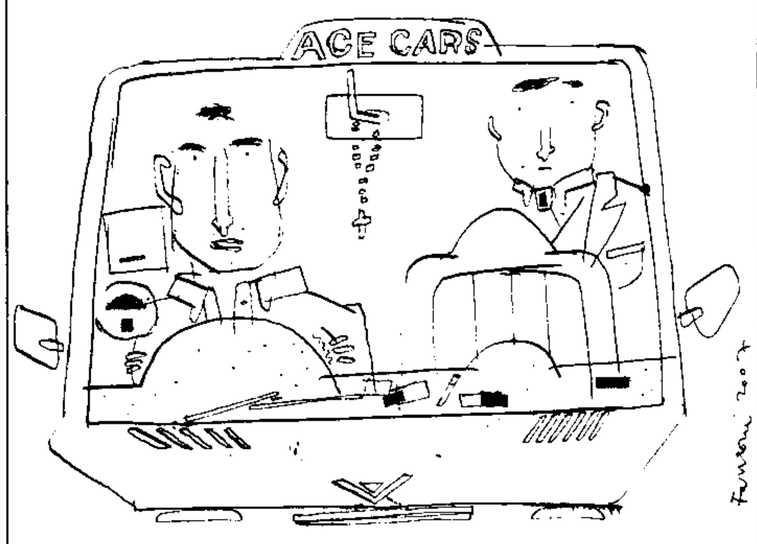
Sir,

Call me prickly but I thought that your Flat Nav cartoon was in bad taste (1185, p14). The widespread instances of cruelty to wild animals (they range from teenagers kicking swans to death to nailing baby rabbits to fences) will not be helped by promoting "humour" of this kind. We should all encourage a more paternalistic attitude towards our dwindling wildlife – hedgehog numbers having been especially reduced in recent years. Indeed, our local wildlife veterinary hospital in Leatherhead (www.wildlifeaid.org.uk) has its annual open day this year on Father's Day (17 June). I think you should attend.

DAFYDD LEWIS,

Via email.

Scenes You Seldom See



"Ever since I was a little kid, all I ever wanted to do is drive a mini cab"

Mucked it up?

Sir,

Once again you have unfairly linked Accenture to Arthur Andersen (Down on the Farm, 1184). Since 1989 the companies have been separate entities, when Andersen Consulting was spun off. Arthur Andersen kept the accounting practice, and Andersen Consulting, since 2000 known as Accenture, took consulting. The split was not amicable. There is no possible link between the ethics of an accountant in Houston and Accenture's consultancy in Britain for Defra. You are just trying to score a cheap point by association. Next time get your facts straight.

JACK EVERT,

Via email.

Geri pandering

Sir,

Re Pseuds Corner (1184) – Geri Halliwell quote from "My Week" in the Times.

My Week is my Saturday parody column. I know a fine parody can be hard to spot, but I sort of thought that you lot, of all people, might be up to it.

HUGO RIFKIND,

The Times.

● (Er... er... apologies to Geri Halliwell. Ed.)

Feeling the heat

Sir,

Sir John Bourn's blood might boil if he read "Bourn freebie" (1184) but it probably has already if, as you report, the temperature in the Caribbean in October was "a balmy 80° C" (176° Fahrenheit).

Clearly, global warming is even more serious than I thought.

Yours parchedly,
KEITH FARR,

Cholsey, Oxon.

New Broon

Sir,

I loved The Broon-ites cartoon [Eye 1185, p19] and hope that you will publish more. In the spirit of constructive criticism, may I point out that the Scottish Executive banned smoking in enclosed public places in March 2006, and it is unlikely that Gordon Broon could smoke his pipe in a pub unmolested.

Broon's accent appears to slip from time to time, as when he refers to "meself" rather than the correct "masel'", although perhaps this reflects his desire to emphasise his Britishness to the wider electorate.

I looked up "nurgling" online, and I'm pretty sure that Scotland doesn't have a haggis nurgling team, but if we do I'll bet we are unbeaten.

Yours faithfully,
FRED MATHISEN,

Aberdour (in Broon's constituency).

Sir,

I am not too sure about the "legs" that a Broons spoof might have; the famous Sunday Post cartoon strip has but two storylines. In one, a character overhears a piece of gossip, but crucially misunderstands one word (with hilarious consequences). In the other, Paw won't pay out his good-looking money to a tradesman, when he can do just as good a job himself for half the price (with hilarious consequences).

Yours with me Boglers dangling
(as I believe they say in the South of England),
DAVE HENDERSON,

Via email.

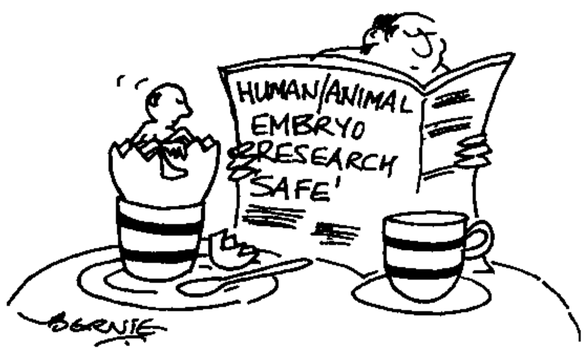
Sir,

Loved the Broon-ites. Please make them a regular feature.

Braw!

BOB CARROLL,

Kirkcaldy.



Has-Beanos?

Sir,

Am I the only one who's single regret at the forthcoming departure of our dear leader is the imminent demise of the unmatched St Albion Parish News?

Are we to be left with The Broonites v Dave Snooty as the most imaginative parody of our current political reality that Private Eye can come up with?

Perhaps you should rename your organ The Beano.

Yours,
MARTIN ST JOHN,

Via email.

SOLUTIONS

"Boardsup.com: Property Board Solutions, the one stop solution to all your board requirements" – *'For Sale' signs*

"Harrow Green Business Change Solutions" – *office removals*

"End Of Life Vehicle Depollution Solutions" – *scrap*

"Truck Align Co. Ltd – Total Repair Solutions for Trailers" – *trailer repairs*

"Invasive Weed Solutions" – *weedkiller*

"Yeoman Rainguard Rainwater Solutions" – *gutters*

All submitted by readers

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"The gods didn't shine on them [Liverpool] last night..."
STEVE McCLAREN, Sky News
(Anthony P. Mullen)

"You've got to have eyes all over you in a game like this."
GRAHAM TAYLOR, Radio 5 Live
(Jason Heath)

"Rafael Benitez is down there making hand signals but no one will hear him in this atmosphere."
MIKE INGHAM, Radio 5 Live
(Philip Moor)

"I've had one of the worst upbringings of my life."
Guest on Jeremy Kyle program, ITV
(David Swann)

"Paul Jewell's anxiety is written all over his body language."
JOHN MURRAY, Radio 5 Live
(Neil Sinclair)

Lookalike

Guyler

Zoellick

Sir,

Paul Wolfowitz may look like Count von Count (Eye 1185) but the new nomination for head of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, is Deryck Guyler, no mistake.

DOMINIC EVANS,

Via email.

Church times

Sir,

Lunchtime O'Boulez's vitriol over Islamic choral work at Westminster is hardly the writing of a man who understands much. The Catholic Church is guilty of many things, including defence/denial of kiddy-diddling, genocide and hypocrisy. However, the work of the English Catholic Church now towards religious union is a genuine and valid one. They may not be perfect (who is?) but in a world where the likes of Bush and Co are creating a new Crusades mentality, surely anything to bring religious diversity together in the worship and belief in God/Yahweh/Jehovah/Allah is surely a good thing not to be sneered at. After all, if Boulez knew anything about the Qu'ran, he would know that Jesus is accepted as a prophet, if not the son of God, and that the whole creation of Islam was from Mohammed's disgust at the hypocrisy of Judaism and Christianity at early stages. Some things never change but the Catholic Church's look for peace and understanding is still a genuine one.

And this comes from an ex-Catholic.

PETE HARDY,

Mexico.

Magnificent 2007

"We are poor farmers, we wish to hire a website designer to highlight the trouble our village has with bandits..."

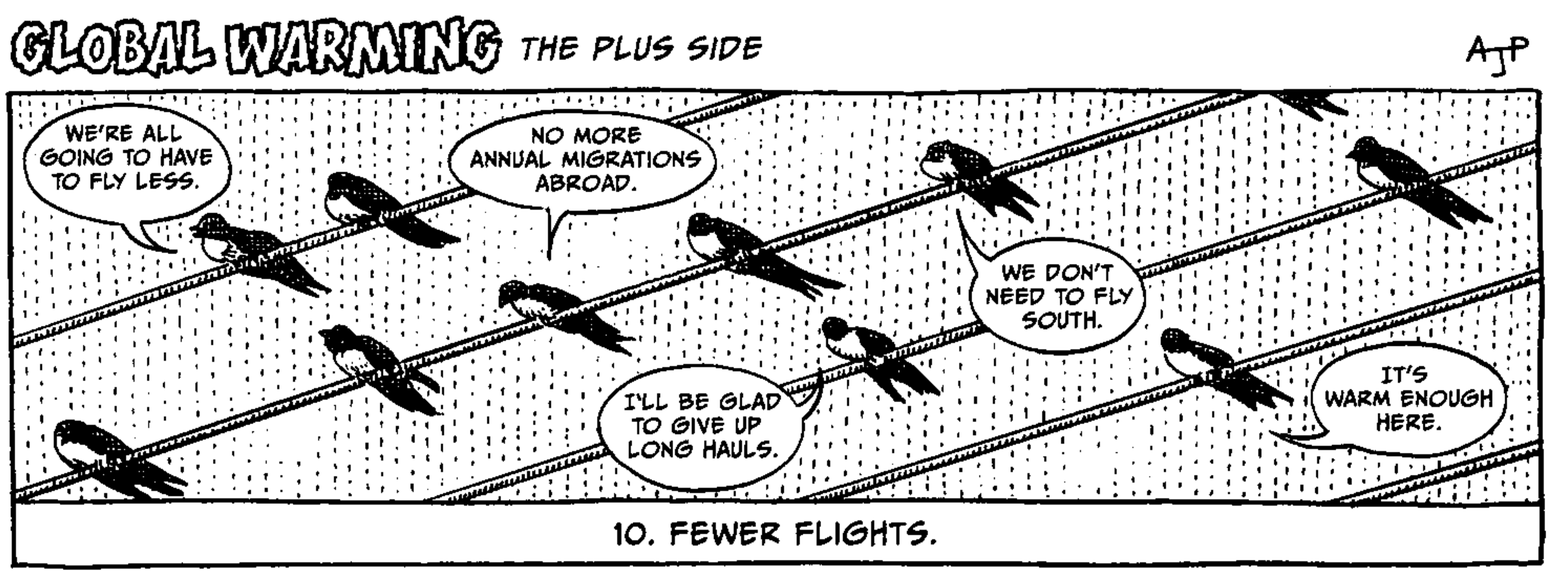
Pedants corner

Sir,

No one has ever accused me of being a pedantic git... er... but Mr Kinsley's letter is not quite right and he claims to be a fellow pedant. Goering was not Hitler's Interior Minister – he was Prussian Interior Minister, but not the Reich's: that was Wilhelm Frick at the time of the Reichstag Fire.

Yours, etc,
MARK EAGERS,

Via email.


GLOBAL WARMING THE PLUS SIDE
AJP
WE'RE ALL GOING TO HAVE TO FLY LESS.
NO MORE ANNUAL MIGRATIONS ABROAD.
WE DON'T NEED TO FLY SOUTH.
I'LL BE GLAD TO GIVE UP LONG HAULS.
IT'S WARM ENOUGH HERE.
10. FEWER FLIGHTS.

Letter from **Iasi**

from Our Own Correspondent

THE Europa Hotel is everything the new Romania says it wants to be: cool, modern, lots of glass and steel, one of the most imposing buildings we have in Iasi, our second city.

But as with so much else here since the end of communism, there is a big difference between how things appear and how they are. It is possible to visit the Europa and find no food or drink in the restaurant, no lights on in any rooms. And no guests.

Change, however, is in the air – and it has been encouraged by some of the very people who wanted it least.

Last month our president, Traian Basescu, a captain of ocean-going oil tankers before turning to politics, won a huge majority in a referendum that could finally force the old nomenklatura of ex-Securitate thugs and dodgy businessmen who have made us the closest thing in Europe to a banana republic, to accept reform.

Voters backed Popeye, as we call him, to the horror of our parliament which had accused Basescu of acting like a dictator and supported his impeachment. Instead, 74 percent of Romanians said the president should be restored to office, endorsing his reform programme. This includes proposals to elect members of parliament on the basis of geographical constituencies rather than from an anonymous party list filled with those able to buy their place on it.

Unlike former presidents Iliescu and Constantinescu, both "intellectuals", our more earthy, balding seadog has publicly condemned communism, returned confiscated property, rehabilitated prisoners and named names. He has taken on our corrupt elite, he enjoys a drink and acts like a man of the people. We like him.

Our European brothers seem less sure. The Party of European Socialists, led by Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, backed the MPs against the president. Let's hope there's some European initiative for which the great Dane needs the support for our Social Democratic Party (PSD) – otherwise it's hard to fathom such wilful stupidity.

Even the PSD, which is neither social nor democratic, looks like it has now had enough of party leader Mircea Geona, who looks set for the political wilderness after pursuing the disastrous referendum strategy. "The little idiot", as he was once called by blood-stained PSD eminence grise Ion Iliescu, will join there the party's fragrant former prime minister, Adrian Nastase. "Seven houses" was once courted by Messrs Blair and Bush. He is now a laughing stock after claiming to have inherited a million bucks from his old Aunt Tamara, who lived in a humble two-room apartment in Bucharest.

Some opponents of change are more formidable. The prime minister, millionaire former car dealer Calin Tariceanu, is the protégé of one our own Russian-style oligarchs, Dinu Patriciu, the owner of Rompetrol, who also has interests in media and real estate. Others who bridge the gap between money and power include PSD leader Viorel Hrebenciuc; former industry minister Dan Ioan Popescu – who admits to being worth €11m and is under investigation; and Dan Voiculescu, whose murky past is presently sub-judice, a media magnate and leader of the tiny Conservative Party, who has accumulated a $400m fortune.

Then there are the ultra-nationalists, led by Vadim Tudor, and the Party for Greater Romania which acts as a stalking horse for the PSD. Superficially a buffoon, Vadim is a skilled and dangerous demagogue.

Basescu is a wily fox who has long since shed the communist clothes he wore as a younger man. He's up for a fight and has proved himself a first-class player of political poker. But he will need to be first class. His enemies are bloodied, not beaten – and they can still find refuge in a loop-hole littered constitution we fashioned from a mix of the best on offer from France and Belgium.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● We live in a generation that doesn't stay in one place. The burial process is expensive and becoming unrealistic. Many are turning to cremation as an alternative.

That's why we created Huggable Urns, to celebrate life, not its ending. The softness of a cute Huggable Urn will help take away that eerie feeling about death, by breaking down the mystery and fear surrounding the natural process of death and grieving.

All of our Huggable Urns come with a soft velvet pouch for storing the ashes. The pouches are lined with plastic and have a tight velcro closure to keep the ashes contained and odor free. The Huggable Urns have a zippered opening to hold the pouch. Each urn is discreet and stylish enough to keep visible in the home without causing discomfort or embarrassment to visitors.

Our most popular Huggable Urns include: "Cocoa Boy" Teddy Bear Urn; "Snowy" Teddy Bear Urn; Angel Bear Urn with Detachable luminous Wings; Angel Dog Urn with Detachable luminous Wings; Champagne Celebration Dog Urn; "Fluffy" the Regal Grey Cat Urn; White or Royal Blue Pillow.

It makes me proud to be from a generation that understands and embraces the cycle of life. Society has become so fast paced that many of us see the value in making our own arrangements. Why not have fun personalizing your own Huggable Urn ahead of time, so you don't end up in an impersonal vessel? I look forward to sharing the Celebration of Life with you! *(www.huggableurns.com. Spotter: David S. Cutler)*

– ● –

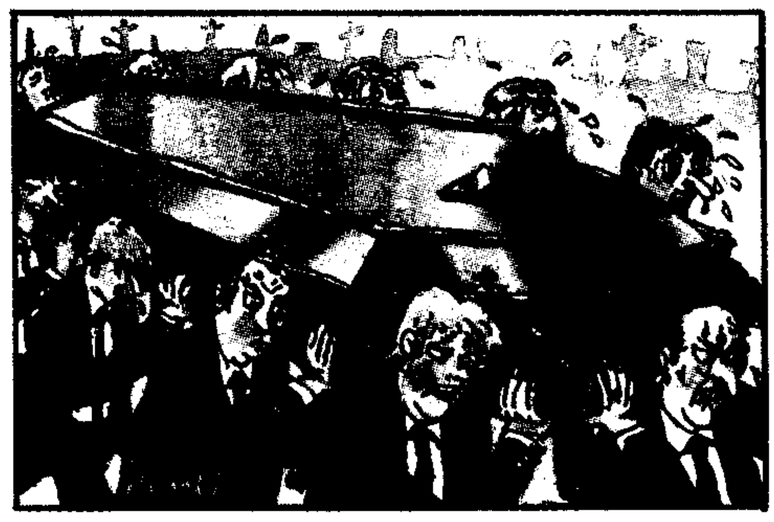
● *"I was down in my garage when it happened," David Eddings told reporters outside the smouldering remains of his office in Carson City, Nevada, "making repairs to my broken-down Excalibur sports car. I was using water to flush out the gas tank when some fluid started leaking out, and I began wondering what the hell it was. I didn't want to leave a tankful of gasoline slowly leaking onto the garage floor, so I lit a piece of paper and threw it into the puddle of liquid, to test if it was flammable. In retrospect, I can see that this was a lapse of judgement on my part."*

Eddings, a seventy-five-year-old writer of fantasy novels, was speaking after fire had raged through his garage and adjacent office, destroying the original manuscripts of most of his books. "One word comes to mind," he continued. "Dumb. My intention was to prevent a fire, but I've destroyed most of my life's work, all my writing equipment, and all the juniper trees that used to line the driveway. The loss of the sports car is a little painful too, because I've had it since the 70s. It made for a real fancy vehicle, right up until it burned." (Nevada Appeal, 26/1/07. Spotter: Sion Lloyd)

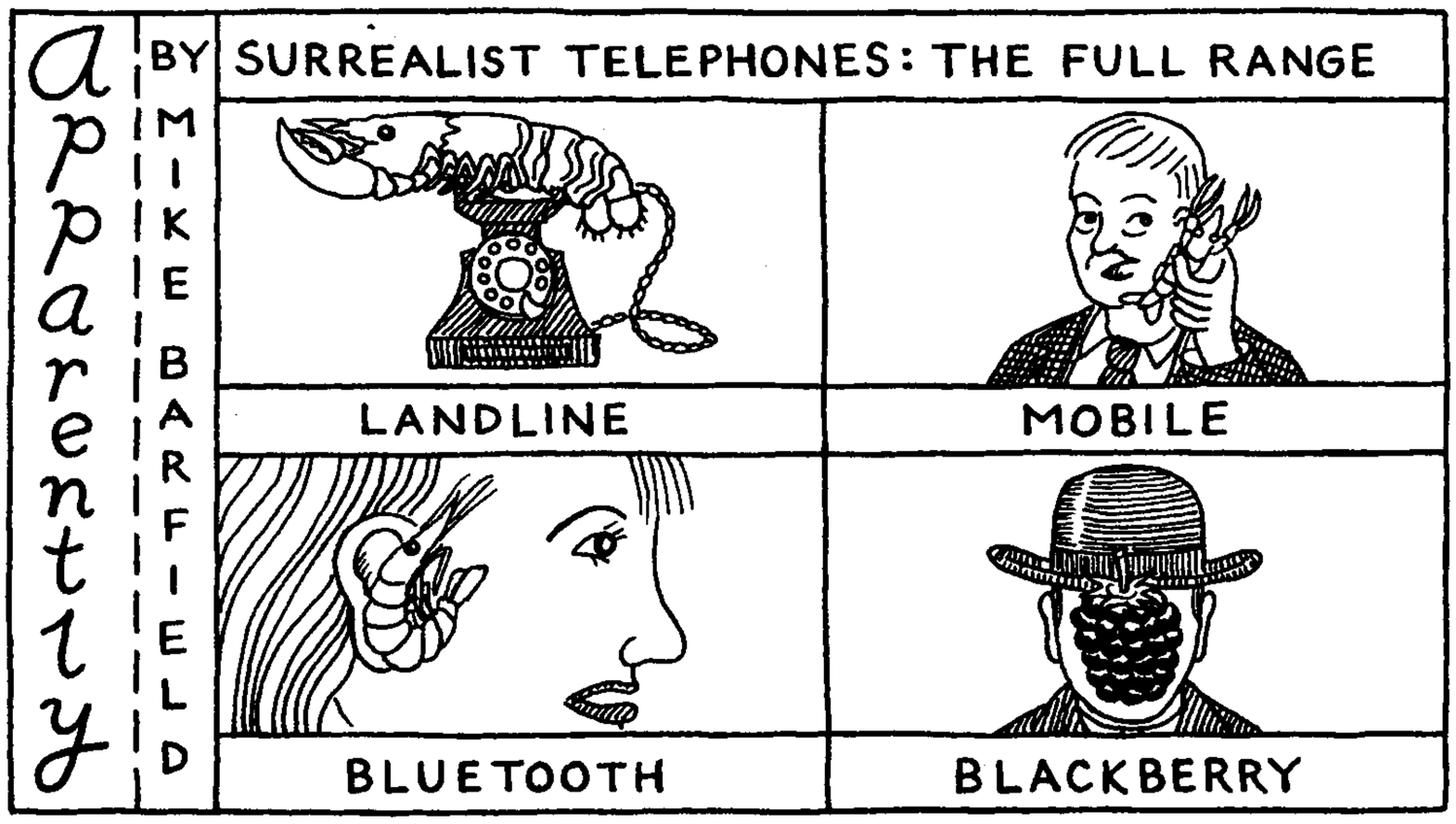
– ● –

● "We haven't yet had to turn away any corpses," Ivan Webber of Woronora Crematorium told reporters in New South Wales, "but it's sometimes a narrow fit. The obesity epidemic in Australia means that we're often asked to cremate bodies weighing 200 kilograms or more, so we're having to install larger furnaces and wider entrances, to accommodate larger coffins. Cemeteries are also having to dig bigger holes than in the past, and funeral directors need to employ more pallbearers to carry heavier coffins."

"There's a growing demand for cremators that can cope with larger coffins," added Nigel Gleeson of the Major Furnace company, "so we've adjusted our design to allow for oversized



caskets. It's a worldwide problem, not just an Australian one. Local authorities in Britain are also discovering that their furnaces are too narrow to deal with wider coffins containing the bodies of people who were, quite literally, morbidly obese. Traditional Australian coffins have always been 60 centimetres wide, and our furnaces were built to cope with that size. But some councils recently started ordering special extra-wide cremators from the US, where the crematoriums have been dealing with obese corpses for decades. Those cremators measure 1.2 metres wide, so we're now also expanding our dimensions." *(Sun-Herald [Australia], 29/4/07. Spotter: Patrick Newman)*



NEWS OF THE TOFFS

'I LOVE MY WIFE'

Caught on secret camera

Tory chief's sensational claim by Andy Coulson

IN A startling new revelation Tory leader David Cameron has told friends "My marriage is fine. We are getting along and probably won't be getting divorced."

The News of the Toffs has obtained hitherto unpublished pictures of the happy couple. In one Cameron is clearly seen holding his wife's hand. In another he is giving her what looks like a peck on the cheek outside their Notting Hill love nest.

There were immediate calls for Cameron to resign and his office issued a statement saying that he would stay on as leader.

"We have seen the pictures," said Tory communications director, Andy Coulson, "and we will not be seeking an injunction."

On Other Pages

Gordon Brown – The Paedo Rumour That Won't Go Away

COLD WAR LATEST

LIB DEM MAKEOVER

YES, IT'S BLING CAMPBELL!

IN the latest attempt to appeal to the younger voter, the leader of the Liberal Democrats, Menzies Campbell, agreed to try out a more contemporary look with a facial diamond implant which *(cont. p. 94)*

IRAQ

'Things are getting better' writes MoD spokesman Mike Toady

HAVING recently returned from Iraq, I can tell you that, contrary to endless whingeing reports from the likes of Sir Max Hastings and the rest of the anti-war brigade, large areas of the country are entirely quiet and peaceful.

These places, known locally as 'deserts', are largely populated by sand.

I can assure you that everyday life in these regions of Iraq is much the same as it has always been. No terrorism, no suicide bombers, no insurgents, indeed no people at all.

This gives the lie to *(cont. p. 94)*

EXCLUSIVE TO PRIVATE EYE

Extracts from Nancy Dulallio's sensational new autobiography "THE SVEN YEAR ITCH"

'SVEN LOVED ME SO MUCH HE HAD TO HAVE AFFAIRS WITH OTHER WOMEN'

Chapter One

I AM young and beautiful and Sven is totally captivated by my youth and beauty. To show how much he loves me, Sven will often have affairs with other women.

Tomorrow

SVEN has sex with weather girls, secretaries and anyone else he meets in order to prove how much he loves me.

Extracted from "The Magnificent Sven" by Nancy Dulallio, Trouserpress £19.99

Shakespeare's Masterpiece

KING BLAIR

Tragic tale of a ruler who announces that he is going to give up power and goes completely mad at the ingratitude of his successors and everybody else.

King Blair ..... Sir Ian McKellen
Fool ..... John Prescott
Macbeth .....Gordon Brown
Yorrick .....Ming Campbell

"Have you tried kissing it better?"

Bush Is Not Great (He's Marvellous!)

by Christopher Hitchens

MANY stupid people refuse to believe in a supreme power. I felt like that once but then I had a moment of revelation when I realised that everyone was talking nonsense and that there was an all-powerful benign intelligence that controlled our destinies.

Seen the Light

The ignorant and the uneducated blamed Him for allowing wars in which thousands died or floods in which people's homes were swept away while He merely looked on.

"Why does He allow evil to happen?" they asked, as if this was a sensible question. But it isn't. The fact remains that George Bush *does* exist. Although He moves in mysterious ways and His sayings are sometimes difficult to comprehend, if we have faith in George Bush all will be revealed and our lives will be transformed. We could not wish for more.

● Christopher Hitchens will be getting drunk in Tent 94 at the Hay-on-Wye festival. If you want a signed copy of Richard Dawkins' book on God, he is in Tent 666.

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Matawawa!

That's "hullo!" in Ntgushi, which is what they speak here in Africa where they have just crowned me as "the Prince of Peace"!

Isn't that an amazing tribute to a humble vicar from far-off St Albion's, whose only mission has been to save the world!

Do you remember that text from the Good Book? *"A prophet is not without honour except in his own land?"*.

Hey, true or what? Those wise words might certainly explain why I've been having such an amazing reception in all the countries I've had the privilege of inviting myself to in the past two weeks!

I don't want to go on about it, because, as you know, I'm a pretty modest kind of guy!

In fact, modesty is one of the things I've been most proud of in all the years when I have served you so well as your vicar!

And modesty is something you may not be getting too much of in the future, when my job is taken from me by some over-ambitious, over-bearing successor whom obviously I don't wish to name, but he knows who I have in mind!

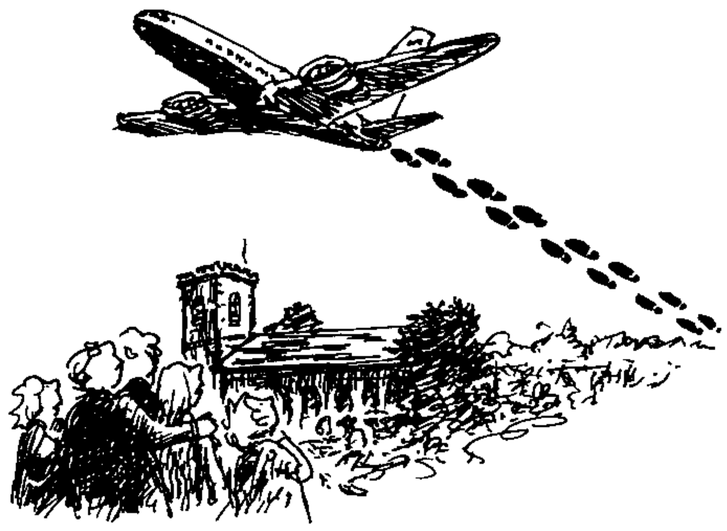
And good luck to him, I say! He's certainly going to need an awful lot of that, considering the mess that he's made of the parish finances and which it will now be up to him to sort out instead of scurrying off to hide in the crypt whenever there's trouble!

Anyway, I know many of you will be wanting to know where all these countries are that have been welcoming me with open arms and hailing me as the Messiah (not literally of course, but nearly, actually, in some places!).

For instance, there was the way I was received in Libya, where the great spiritual leader Col. Gaddafi has won the respect of the world over the past 30 years for the way he has promoted world peace!

Muammar, as I was allowed to call him, built a special tent in which to receive me, and I will never forget his opening words, "Have you brought the cheque from BP?".

Who said that our Muslim brothers haven't got a sense of humour?



The parishioners knew that their vicar was coming home! As seen by local artist Mr de la Nougerede

Missionary becomes Chief!

"450 million thank-yous from the people of Libya," he said, as I handed over the contribution to his congregational funds!

And then there was another country, whose name I can't recall, but it was also somewhere in Africa and they wanted to say thank you for all I have been able to do for them by making me a "Chief", which is what, after all, I have been as your vicar! (And not a mere "Chief-in-waiting", hanging around looking dour and resentful for 10 years, and telling everyone that he would make a better "Chief" than the one anointed by God and not anointed by himself just because there was no one else around who wasn't even more unsuitable than him!)

Anyway, as I've said, I don't want to go on about this, but I've still got a lot more appointments lined up with other spiritual leaders, from His Holiness the Pope to Pastor Merkel, and, of course, above all, the Blessed Nelson of Mandela, one of the only two people on this earth who have some claim to being considered living saints (modesty forbids that I should name the other!).

Which brings me to my fourth and final point. Although, as you can see, I have been kept very busy on what they are calling my "Farewell Tour of the World", I have still found time to keep a close eye on all the really important news of what is going on back home!

And guess what?! Just when everyone was saying that David Beckham was finished, he's been called back to save England.

Everyone said he was going off to America to make lots of money, and would never be seen again!

But only six months later, they're begging him to come back!

And that's because his successor proved hopelessly ill-equipped for the job, and unable to recreate the glory days when a truly great captain was leading his team to one victory after another!

REMIND YOU OF ANYONE?

Goodbye, or should I say "Au revoir" (as my new friend Monsignor Sarkozy might put it!), Tony

POSTCARD FROM MR PRESCOTT ON HIS FAREWELL TOUR OF THE CARIBBEAN

Contrarily to what you may have been misinformated by gossip in the Britannia Arms, I would like to clarificate that I am not here on a free holiday, as has been allegated! In the last 24 hours alone, I have had a working breakfast, a working swim in the pool, a working lunch on the beach, a few working cocktails in the afternoon and then a working five-course dinner with international cabaret. In fact, I have just woken up from a strenuous 13-hour working sleep, but not, I might add, with the leggy limbo dancer whose work we all so richly depreciated last night!

John

'A DAY OUT WITH THE VICAR'

by Martin Amis, 17½, Winner of the Year 12 Essay Prize, St Albion's Kwikfit City Academy

It's incredibly good fun being with the Vicar. You get to go in aeroplanes and meet lots of famous people. Sometimes theVicar doesn't wear a seatbelt – that's how tough he is. And he takes his jacket off – that's how cool he is. And he really fancies sexy models on telly – that's how with-it he is!

"I really like you, Martin," he says. "You're wicked." "Respect!," I reply, which is true because I do respect all that he has achieved. Especially with his great friend Rev. Dubya – supercool or what? *(Is this enough? M.A.)*

■ ***Martin won a copy of former newsletter editor Mr Campbell's new book "The Dodgy Diaries", with which he will be presented on Speech Day by former churchwarden Mr Mandelson.***

BLAIR FAREWELL TOUR SHOCK

TONY BLAIR has defended his controversial decision to pay a brief flying visit to Britain as part of his six-week farewell tour.

"In no way will my short stay in Britain affect my day-to-day duties visiting Africa, America and the Middle East in a desperate attempt to shore up some sort of legacy," said Tony *(cont. p. 94)*

"Huh! All the wheelie-bin big talk and he gives in without a fight!"

ST CAKES HEAD DEFENDS SELECTION ON ABILITY

by Our Educational Staff **G.C.S.E. Fayle**

MR R.J. Kipling (M.A.), headmaster of St Cakes, the prestigious Midlands independent school for boys, last night joined the heated debate about the future of education in Britain.

Said Mr Kipling: "There is nothing wrong with selection on ability providing it is the ability to pay enormous fees.

"Here at St Cakes," he continued, "we are not ashamed of the rigorous entry exam which we require pupils to pass. We call it the 11-Grand-Plus Test and we demand that boys should be able to give me a cheque for at least £11,000 every term.

"We find that this ensures that St Cakes has a very high class intake of money and only the highest standards of payment are admitted."

Means Testing

The headmaster pointed to the success of his policy in terms of the league tables where St Cakes this year appears just above Monaco in terms of GDP.

Mr Kipling concluded, "If I let in boys from poorer backgrounds then I would obviously find that the quality of my car would be affected – not to mention the standard of my holidays."

The St Cakes motto is "Demonstrando Me Argentum" ("Show Me The Money").

'WE ARE THE REAL HEIRS TO BLAIR' – Tories claim

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

IN a savage attack on the Conservative Party, David Cameron last night pledged that he and his followers were the real successors to New Labour.

"It's obvious," he said, "that the most successful politician of modern times is Tony Blair and that the only way to succeed is to be as much like him as possible".

Tory Blair

"The first thing about Tony," Mr Cameron continued, "is that he came to power because he wasn't a Conservative. So it makes sense for us not to be Conservatives either! That's the way you win elections!"

Cameron's colleague George Osborne was quick to pick up the theme. "Gordon Brown isn't very like Tony. No way! But we are! That's why we're going to win."

And David Willetts, known as the brains of the Cameron team, spelled out what this meant in terms of policy.

Bad Grammar

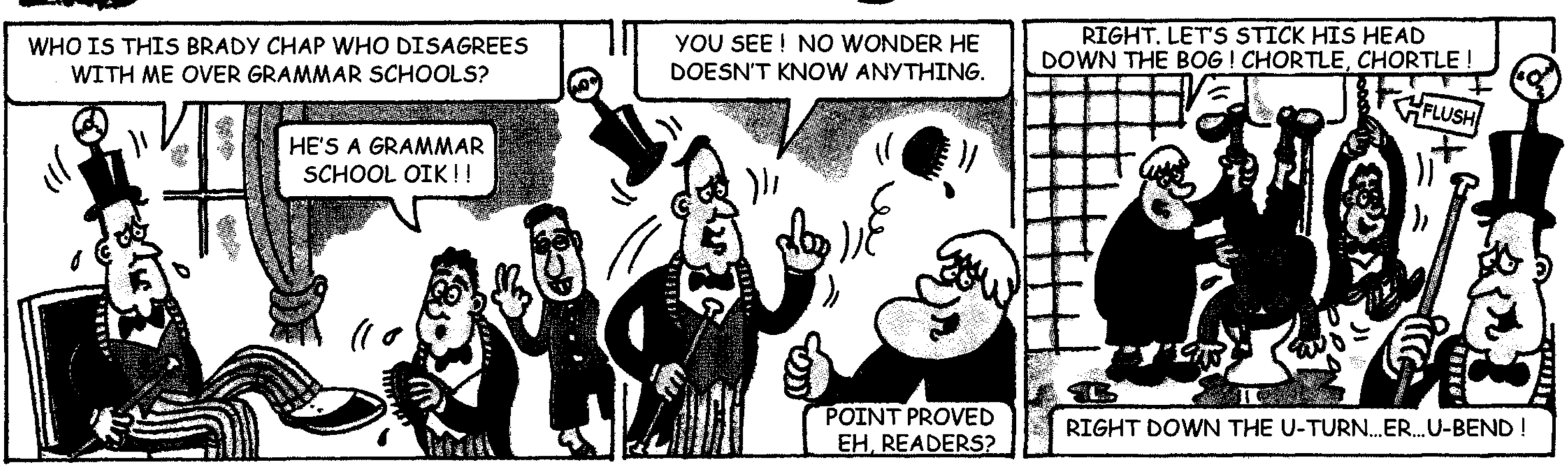
"Tories are in favour of grammar schools," he said. "That's why it is very important that we should be against them."

"The same applies to our thinking right across the board. Tories want low taxes – we want them going up. Tories want law and order – we're against it. Tories believe in marriage – we say ban it!"

LATE NEWS

● **Poll shock – Cameron now "as unpopular as Blair".**

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


WHO IS THIS BRADY CHAP WHO DISAGREES WITH ME OVER GRAMMAR SCHOOLS?
HE'S A GRAMMAR SCHOOL OIK!!
YOU SEE! NO WONDER HE DOESN'T KNOW ANYTHING.
POINT PROVED EH, READERS?
RIGHT. LET'S STICK HIS HEAD DOWN THE BOG! CHORTLE, CHORTLE!
FLUSH
RIGHT DOWN THE U-TURN...ER...U-BEND!

POLICE LOG

Neasden Central Police Station

0842 hrs A number of officers had been reported as driving while on duty in excess of the legal speed limit. These included PC Hainault, who had been driving at 147mph in a 30mph zone, and PC Colindale, who recorded speeds of over 200mph in the Tesco car park. All officers were commended for this evidence of their devotion to duty, and for their bravery in risking serious injury if involved in collisions with members of the public.

0930 hrs 999 call from mobile user in Poundstretcher Lane to report a mixed-race gang of youths, alleged to be of UK ethnic, Romanian, Somali and Kosovan origin, attempting to rob premises of Messrs Ditchling & Wallow, Funeral Directors. Community Support Officer Jamilla Ghee was despatched to explain to the suspects that, under new guidelines, so long as they all apologised no further action would be taken.

1030 hrs Our mobile intelligence source in Poundstretcher Lane rang again to inform us that the alleged suspects had not only failed to apologise but had compounded the original alleged offence by striking CSO Ghee with an inscribed headstone which they had removed from Messrs Ditchling & Wallow's funeral parlour. The duty officer explained that this unfortunate incident must have been due to a breakdown in communications between the gang and CSO Ghee, and it should be assumed that the gang had intended to apologise. Since there was no evidence to the contrary, a form PO3624b was completed by DC Shadwell to the effect that the apology had been offered in accordance with the new procedure, and that therefore no further action need be taken. All officers will be given the day off next Thursday to attend CSO Ghee's funeral.

1123 hrs All officers were detailed to attend "uniform training" in the conference room, where Health & Safety consultants outlined the correct procedure for wearing the new "Blackshirt" uniform to replace the outdated white polyester shirt with black clip-on tie. All officers were invited to provide feedback via the station intranet and PC Vauxhall and WPC Frognal provided a photo-oportunity to demonstrate how to look "non-intimidatory" while wearing full riot gear and carrying loaded AK47 "Pacifier" sub-machine guns.

1245 hrs Emergency meeting convened by Superintendent Brondesbury to report to all station personnel that the Neasden force was suffering a serious target shortfall in respect of the number of charges brought in the past 12 months.

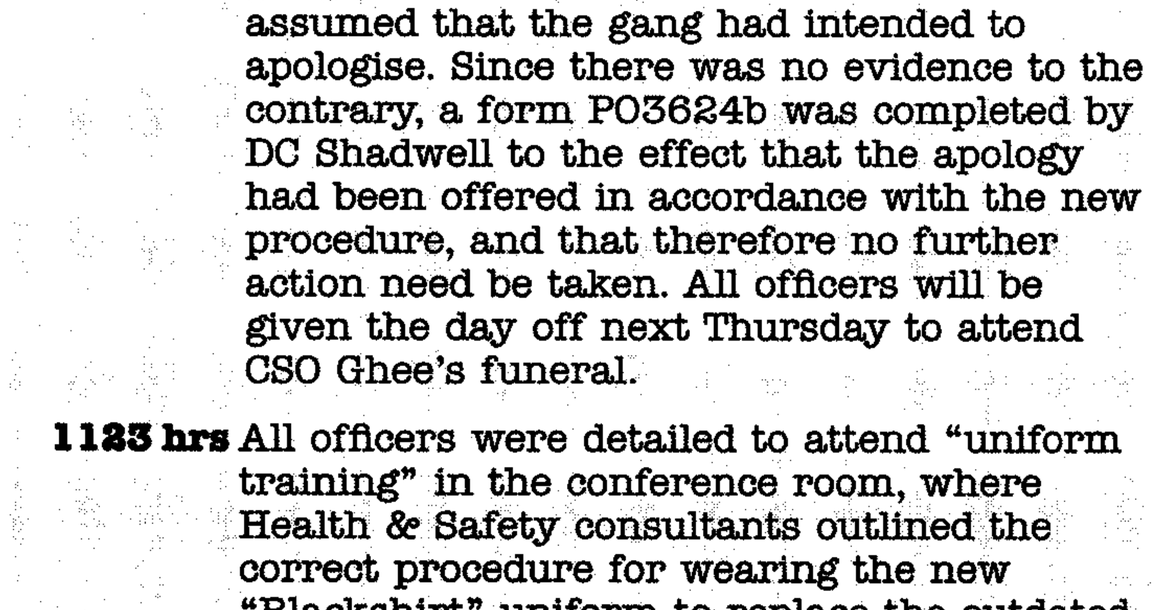
Fortunately a tip-off was received that a major fraud had been identified at the Hugo Chavez Primary School – namely that a nine-year-old white male pupil had attempted to defraud 917 of his fellow pupils to the sum of 1p each by inviting them to sponsor him in a 200-metre walk around the playground for Obesity Awareness Week. The pupil in question, having raised the sum of £9.17, had then failed to pass this on to Obesity Concern, but had instead spent all the collected money on crisps, burgers and assorted confectionery.

This enabled PCs Gospel and Oak to interview the entire school and to record 917 separate charges which were brought against the culprit, thus enabling the station to fulfil its target for "Crimes Solved In 2006-7". An armed response unit was sent to classroom W3 to arrest the boy and to bring him in for further questioning. A number of pupils and teachers were sadly caught in the crossfire before the arrest was satisfactorily concluded.

1815 hrs To celebrate their achievement and the meeting of the target, all officers involved were treated to a celebratory curry supper at the Star of Peshawar, where, as an added bonus, officers were given the opportunity to arrest a fellow diner, a Mr Christopher Tarrant, on the grounds that WPC Aldgate's mother had once applied for tickets for his TV programme but had been informed that none were available.

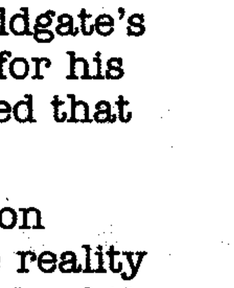
2030 hrs A number of officers were deployed on "Operation Overtime" to monitor the reality TV show "Big Brother" for any breach of the following legislation: Public Order Act 1986, Incitement To Racial Hatred Act 2002, Xenophobic Hate-Crime Directive EC 2004/94, Prevention of Terrorism acts 2005, 2006 and 2007.

While PCs Homerton, Whitechapel and Northolt were engaged on this important crime prevention exercise, they were unable to respond to a number of calls from members of the public reporting an alleged incident of "mass honour-killing" involving members of the Murdahstani community on the Bobby Moore Estate.



"There's no mention of a spectral monk in here"

Exclusive To All Papers



A glass of apple juice a day can:

Prevent/cause asthma*

Halt/speed up the onset of dementia*

Increase/decrease risk of bowel cancer*

Cure/cause baldness*

Make children taller/stunt their growth*

*Delete as applicable, depending on what day of the week it is and what paper you read.

PRIVATE EYE COMPETITION

How green are you?

Simply answer these nine questions to see how your lifestyle is helping to save Planet Earth from the total disaster of global warming in less than ten years' time.

1 **How much of your bathwater do you recycle in cups of fairtrade tea each week?**
(a) one litre
(b) 12 cubic metres
(c) 38 organic hectares

2 **Do you fill your bicycle tyres**
(a) half full?
(b) quarter full?
(c) No, I walk everywhere.

3 **What do you do with your carbon-intensive plastic bags? Do you**
(a) put them in the compost heap?
(b) recycle them as carriers for other plastic bags?
(c) I have a string bag, actually.

4 **Before going to bed at night, do you switch off**
(a) your television?
(b) your computer?
(c) Everything, including our fridge.

5 **As your main energy source, does your home have**
(a) a megawatt wind turbine?
(b) a solar-panelled roof?
(c) We have given up using electricity, thank you, and use only organic candles.

6 **Which of the following have you stopped eating?**
(a) meat
(b) carbon-intensive barley sugar
(c) Everything – we're fasting, thank you very much.

7 **Are your shoes made of**
(a) carbon-intensive plastic?
(b) GM leather?
(c) Clogs made from recycled tyres from the Third World, since you're asking.

8 **Is your roof insulated with**
(a) Tibetan yaks' wool?
(b) old copies of the Guardian containing pieces by George Monbiot?
(c) We live in a tent, so there!

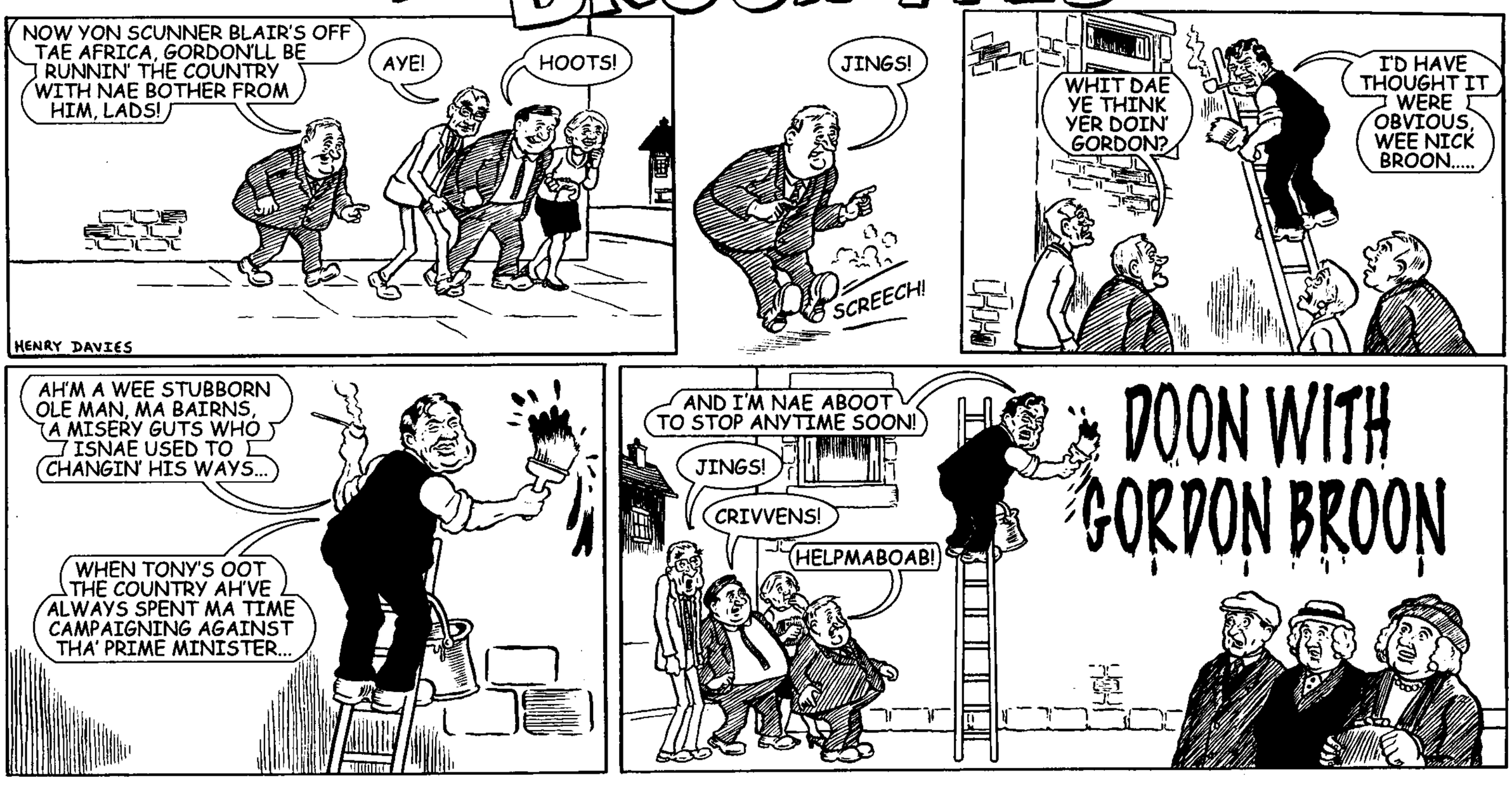
9 **Every year you breathe in oxygen and breathe out 5,914 tons of deadly, polluting carbon dioxide. Should you**
(a) plant a 200-acre forest of mixed deciduous trees in your back garden?
(b) carry a cylinder to 'capture' the CO_2 so that you can bury it under your patio?
(c) We've stopped breathing, actually.

■ **How to score: if you answered all 'C's you have won free round-the-world flights and a holiday for you and your family, including:**

- *14-day safari in state-of-the-art 4x4 Jeep*
- *Coral reef dive to see endangered marine life and collect souvenirs*
- *Arctic stopover with polar bear hunt*
- *Hot-air balloon trip over melting glaciers in the Andes*
- *Speedboat up the Amazon to see the fast-vanishing rainforest, including visit to colourful logging camp and 'Bio-diversity Barbecue'.*

■ ***All runners-up to receive "Eye Saved The World" t-shirt (100% polyester, made in China)***

SCOTLAND'S FUNNIEST CARTOON! **THE BROON-ITES** THE CANNIEST COMIC CLIQUE!


NOW YON SCUNNER BLAIR'S OFF TAE AFRICA, GORDON'LL BE RUNNIN' THE COUNTRY WITH NAE BOTHER FROM HIM, LADS!
AYE!
HOOTS!
HENRY DAVIES
JINGS!
SCREECH!
WHIT DAE YE THINK YER DOIN' GORDON?
I'D HAVE THOUGHT IT WERE OBVIOUS, WEE NICK BROON.....
AH'M A WEE STUBBORN OLE MAN, MA BAIRNS, A MISERY GUTS WHO ISNAE USED TO CHANGIN' HIS WAYS...
WHEN TONY'S OOT THE COUNTRY AH'VE ALWAYS SPENT MA TIME CAMPAIGNING AGAINST THA' PRIME MINISTER...
AND I'M NAE ABOOT TO STOP ANYTIME SOON!
JINGS!
CRIVVENS!
HELPMABOAB!
DOON WITH GORDON BROON

MI6 DENIES MURDER

MI6 has rejected as nonsense claims by former spy Andrei Lugovoy that it killed Russian dissident Alexander Litvinenko.

"Litvinenko's poisoning was carried out with meticulous timing and ruthless efficiency, which obviously rules us out of having anything to do with it," said a bemused senior MI5 *(cont. p. 94)*

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

CHANNEL 4 DOCUMENTARY OUTRAGE

Why can't Diana be given privacy in her death?

ON OTHER PAGES

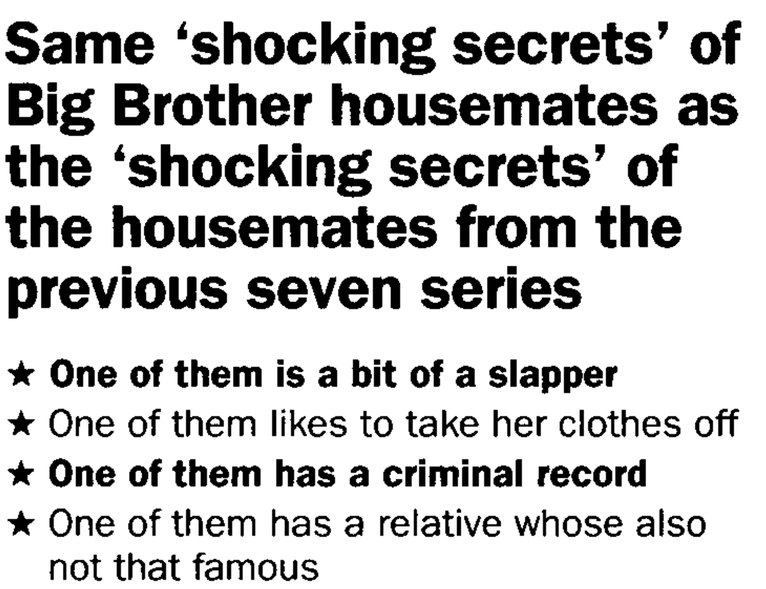
- ☐ Was Diana pregnant when she died? **6-9**
- ☐ Was Diana killed by Mossad? **12-17**
- ☐ Was Diana's death faked? **23-34**
- ☐ Win a porcelain statuette of the smashed up car **94**

EVEN MORE EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

Same 'shocking secrets' of Big Brother housemates as the 'shocking secrets' of the housemates from the previous seven series

- ★ **One of them is a bit of a slapper**
- ★ One of them likes to take her clothes off
- ★ **One of them has a criminal record**
- ★ One of them has a relative whose also not that famous
- ★ **None of them are very interesting**

NEW-LOOK ULSTER



*"Of course if we **do** move in here, that decor is going to have to be changed for a start"*

Exclusive to all newspapers

HAY DIARY

GUESS WHAT! When like everyone else I was at the legendary Hay festival this week I saw a huge number of celebrities, some of whom had even written books!

The great thing about Hay is how many incredibly amusing incidents happen all the time involving famous literary people. For instance yesterday, I was waiting outside one tent when I saw glamorous über-agent and publishing queen **Ed Victor** wearing a pair of strappy sandals even though it was raining! *(Is this right, Ed?!!)*

"What a wellie funny incident" quipped legendary wit **Sir John Mortimer** or was it **Sir John Walsh** or possibly *(You're fired, Ed.)*

Wye-at Hay Festival Highlights

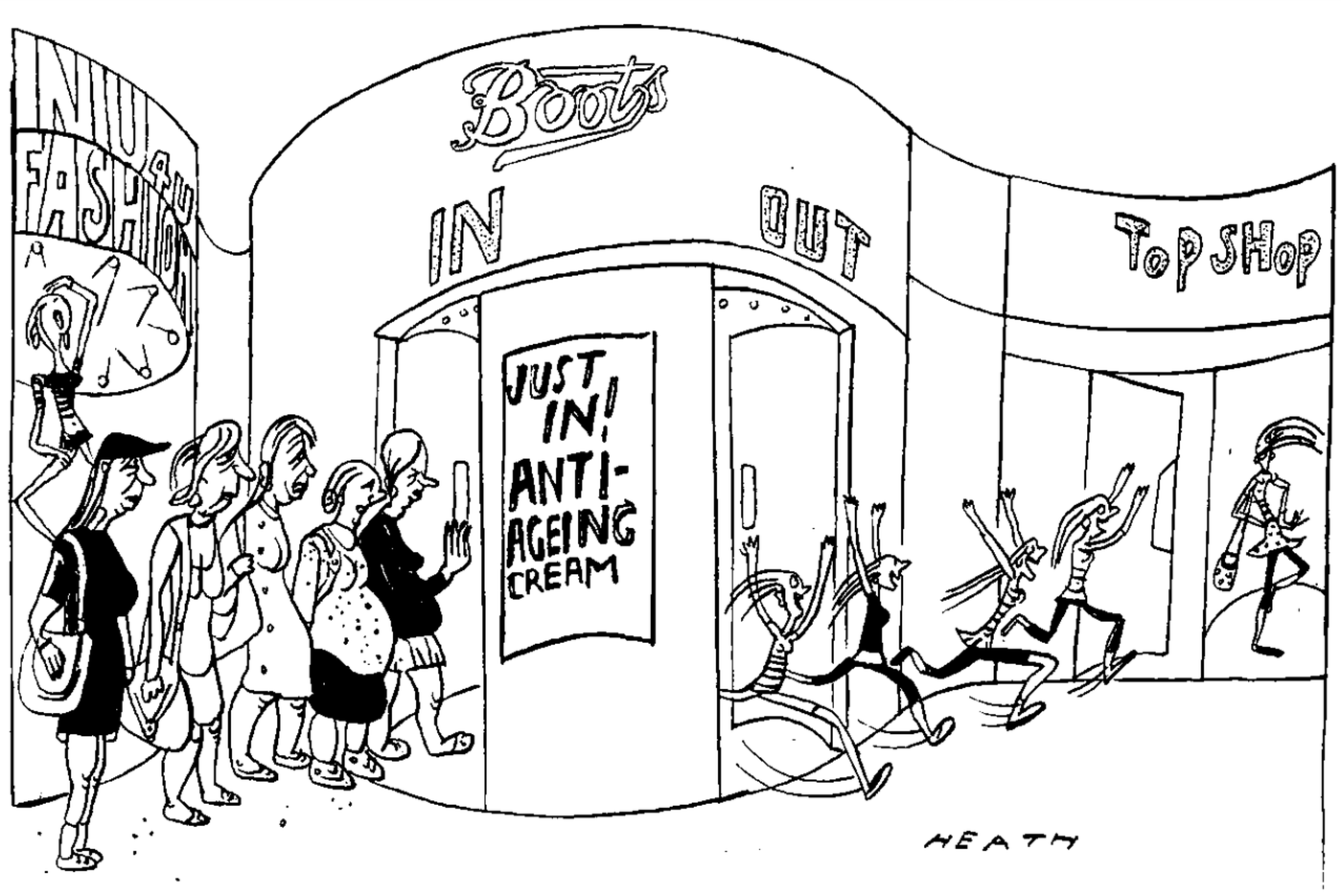
3.15pm *Frostrup Marquee*
"Whither the Biography?"
Gordon Brown talks to Coleen McCloughlin.

4.30pm *Clinton Tent*
"Whither the Novel?"
Dame Vivienne Westwood in conversation with Jade Goody.

6pm *Hay-on-Frye Pavillion*
"Whither the Literary Festival?"
Symposium with cast of Eastenders
(That's enough. Ed.)

That Unbroadcast Racist Big Brother 'Limerick' In Full

There once was a programme so tacky
That its contestants almost said "Paki".
But the bosses at Channel Four
Just commissioned some more
Because Big Brother got big ratings and despite their behaviour none of those responsible were given the sacky!



POETRY CORNER

Lines written on the 150th anniversary of Sir Edward Elgar and the 40th anniversary of the Beatles' Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

So. Sir Edward Elgar.
You are 150.
You composed the Last
Night Of The
Proms.

But Keith and I
Would much rather
Listen to the Fab
Four.

So. Sgt Pepper.
It was 40 years
Ago today
That your band
Began to play.

All together now –
Sgt Pepper's Lonely
Hearts Club
B-a-a-a-a-a-a-a-nd!!!

E.J. Thribb (33⅓)

- Would you like to hear a podcast of E.J. Thribb listening to Sgt Pepper?

OR

- Would you like to give us your views on whether or not Elgar should have been taken off the £20 note in his anniversary year?

OR

- Don't you care about Elgar and the Beatles at all?

Join the debate by emailing us at once at desperaterubbish@telegraph.co.uk

Sir John Major (aged 47¾) writes exclusively for Private Eye on the handover of power from one prime minister to another

WITH my not inconsiderable experience of politics at the highest level, I feel obliged to point out to Mr Gordon Brown, as he takes over the reins of office from Mr Tony Blair, that, in my judgement, history teaches us one incontrovertible lesson, ie that when a prime minister who has dominated their country for many years finally steps down, in favour of a less charismatic successor, the result is in no small measure invariably disastrous. I am thinking, of course, of when Mr Sir Winston Churchill handed over to Mr Sir Anthony Eden, or of when Mr Harold Wilson was succeeded by Mr James Callaghan. But I am not thinking at all of when I was chosen to clear up the mess left behind by the woman whose name I never mention, ie Mrs Lady Thatcher.

PS. Private Eye wanted me to make sure that I mentioned Mrs Currie in this exclusive article, as this would "sell lots of copies", but I refused and told them that I am now a senior retired statesman and have no truck with such trivial tittle-tattle.

PPS. Incidentally, my much-acclaimed book on cricket, *"John Major's Book Of Cricket"*, is still available in all good curry shops *(surely "Waterstone's"? Ed.)*.

WHY ENGLAND MUST QUALIFY

by E.I. Adios

IF THE unthinkable happens and McClaren's men fail to qualify for Europe 2008 then the unthinkable will happen.

Hundreds of sportswriters like myself will be left at home watching it all on TV intead of having a free gigantic fortnight's piss-up in Austria!

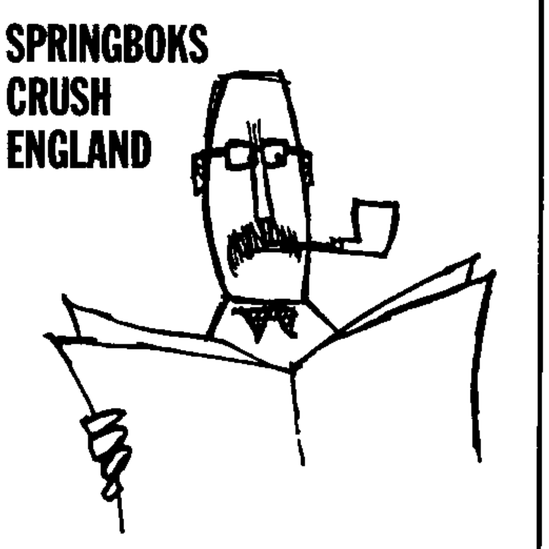
And that is truly undrinkable.

So that is why I've stopped slagging off McClaren's useless team and started desperately supporting our brave boys – Becks, Lamps, Crouchy and all the other ones!

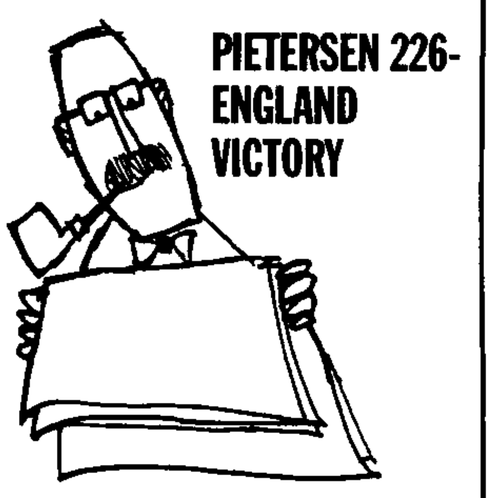
Come on you drinks!

©*All newspapers*

chatto revisited



"Bloody South Africans..."



"Jolly good chaps some of them"

WORLD OF MOTOR RACING

FANS FURIOUS AT RACE FIX

by Our Grand Prix Staff
Charlie Wheelsoff

DISGUSTED spectators vented their fury last night after they were denied the spectacle of the young challenger Lewis Hamiliband taking on the team leader Gordando Alongwait.

Formula Tone

"This is rubbish," said one. "Hamiliband wasn't allowed to overtake Gordando, even though he was obviously much better and more likely to win."

"Instead, we had to watch a dull procession in which Gordando drove slowly and prudently round and round in circles until coming to a complete halt at the Chequers Flag."

EYE HIGHLIGHTS

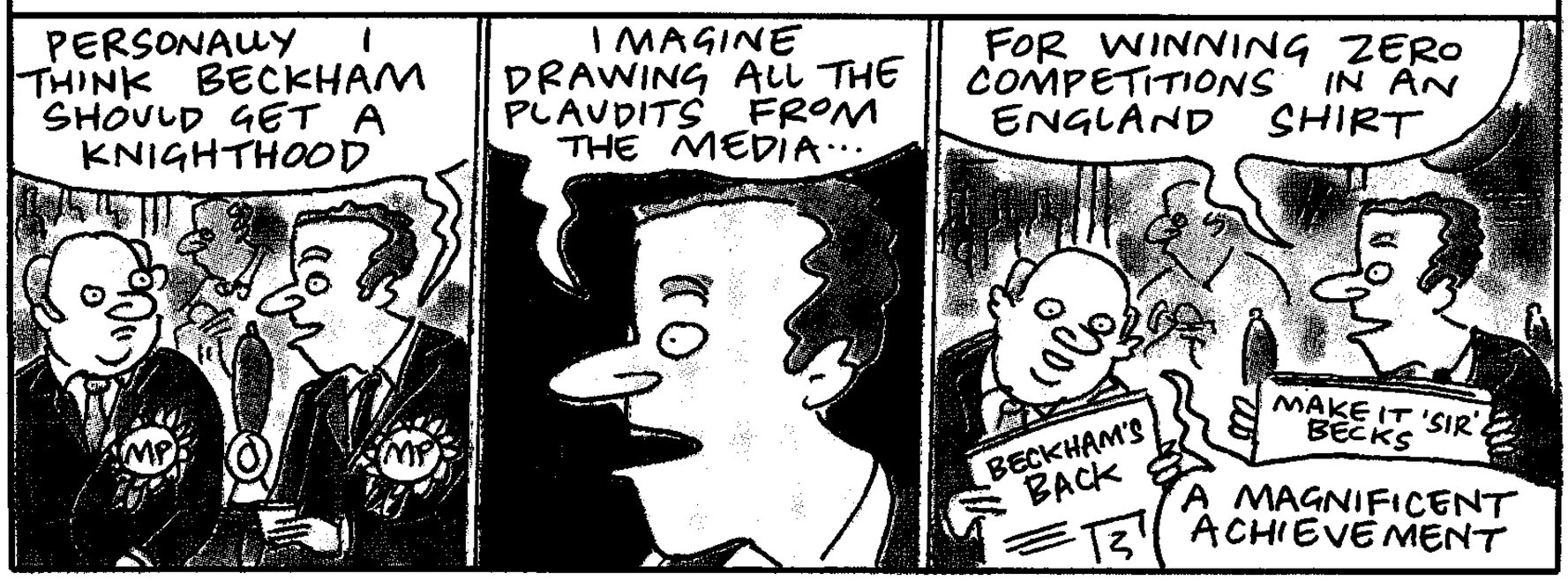
FILMS

Pirates of the Caribbean 94

YES, they're back! Those thieving pirates from Disney who are going to take your money and sail off leaving you half-dead with boredom, marooned in a creaky old vessel that takes over three hours to get nowhere.

Eye verdict *They should all walk the plank (played by Keira Knightley)*

the PREMIERSH*TS


PAUL WOOT
PERSONALLY I THINK BECKHAM SHOULD GET A KNIGHTHOOD
MP
MP
I IMAGINE DRAWING ALL THE PLAUDITS FROM THE MEDIA...
FOR WINNING ZERO COMPETITIONS IN AN ENGLAND SHIRT
BECKHAM'S BACK
MAKE IT 'SIR' BECKS
A MAGNIFICENT ACHIEVEMENT

DIARY

BRIAN JAMES

No musicologist of any true standing would, I think, be prepared to stand alone in the belief that Brian James (b. 1959) was the key member of the influential group, The Damned, or, as they are called in German (which I first taught myself in order to translate their song-sheets from their little-known German albums, which I picked up in a second-hand record shop in Dusseldorf, where I happened to be Honorary Guest at an extremely prestigious Literary Luncheon) *Die Durmned*. Nevertheless, James – the most important guitarist of his generation – is instrumental in the group, for an instrument is never less than what James plays.

"Fuck off you fuckin' fucker"
– Brian James, 1976

Tanizaki, a far more important writer than Mishima, though less important than Yamamoto, who was more important than Toshiba, whose appliance of science put him on almost exactly the same level of importance as Minihaha, would have understood this of Brian James: that the anguish he expresses is expressible only as anguish.

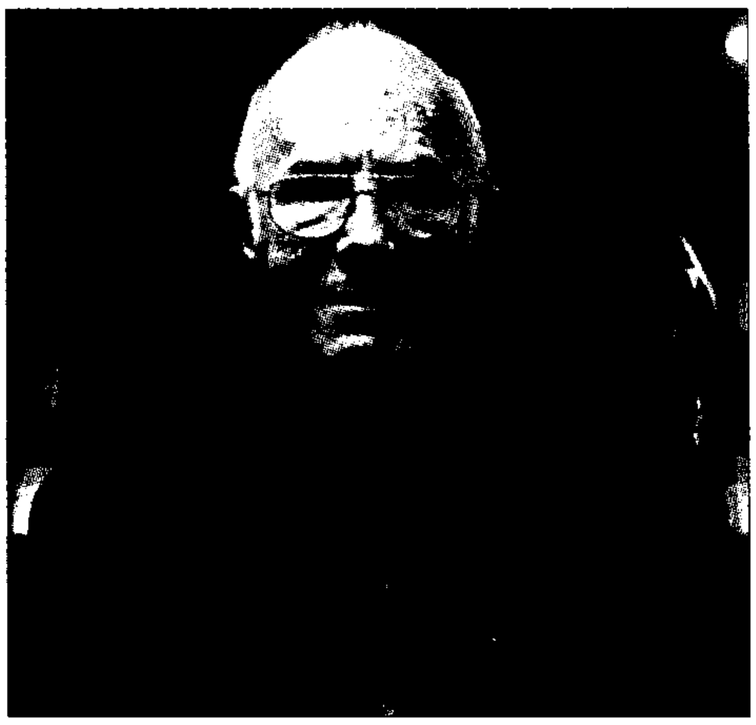
JESSE JAMES

To call Jesse James (1847-1882) a gunslinger is, as Marcel Reich-Ranicki never said in his monumental diaries, which I have read all the way through, twice, in Portuguese, and a third time back-to-front, only half the point. Jesse may have slung guns, but the guns he slung were his own. The most important gun-slinger of his generation, he was, of course, much more than a slinger of guns: the guns he slung may have been fire-arms, but they fired not arms, but bullets. The effect this had was to make them more effective. One of the reasons Jesse was more than a gunslinger is that he was never less.

Or rather, if he were ever less then he would almost certainly be more.

"Stick 'em up!"
– Jesse James, 1881

My own deep interest in sticks and all branches of stickology was inspired by a conversation I once conducted with Robert Crush, not himself a conductor but the most important pianist of his generation. Crush convinced me of something that was certainly convincing, for it left me with the conviction that Jesse James was far more than just a convict: though the master of the stick-up, he was never stuck-up, and if ever he stuck you up, it was up to you not to let it stick.



CLIVE JAMES'S CULTURAL NAUSEA

POLLY JAMES

Polly was not just a bird: she was a Liver Bird. The most important situation comedy of its generation, The Liver Birds was always more than just a comedy of situations. The Liver Bird Annual 1971 remains the third best book for the student to read on the subject, and should have a place in every library. I managed to acquire it in the rare Swiss edition, and taught myself Swiss in order fully to appreciate its nuances, many of which yield their fullest nuance only after being rewritten as epic verse, and that only by one fully versed in the epic.

"Eee, Sandra – ah don't 'alf fancy 'im"
– Polly James, 1969

To fancy another is the lot of many: and for many it is a lot of others they will fancy. Like Picasso and Hemingway, I too have fancied many women. Which of the two Liver Birds I myself fancied must remain a matter for intellectual conjecture: but what no-one can deny – the Norwegians have a word for it: *benekte* is that one hell of a lot of fancying in my household once the distinctive theme tune – reminiscent of one of Schubert's minor sonatas – of The Liver Birds had proceeded.

Did Iosif Stalin ever watch The Liver Birds? This is a question the greatest historians of their generations will wish to grapple with for years to come. What must not be denied by serious students of the subject, however, is that, regardless of his taste in situation comedy, Stalin was not just a very very bad man: he was a man who made very very bad an epithet wholly insufficient to describe his very very badness.

SALLY JAMES

Sally James (b. 1950) was without question the most distinguished busty television presenter of her generation. Though most notable for her unrivalled contribution to the essential Tiswas (1977-83), she was also the co-author of "The Tiswas Flan-Throwers Handbook" (1980), the best single work on flan-throwing by a young lovely in a wet T-shirt. Over the years, I must have looked at the inside colour photographs in this book at least a hundred times – as many times as I have sat through Gluck's monumental Orfeo, or re-read Marcel Proust's magisterial A La Recherche du Temps Perdu – literally "Of Researching Temporary Perdition" – in Spanish.

"Ooh! You just made my T-shirt go all SOGGING!" – Sally James, 1979

It was probably Italy's foremost poet Eugenio Montale (1896-1981) who taught me everything I know about all that is contained within a wet T-shirt. The path to wisdom is seldom less than rocky, but this I have learned: a wet T-shirt prevents even the driest wit becoming shirty: the shirt may be wet, but no tea can be called dry when offered in a teacup by someone in a D cup.

SID JAMES

The acknowledged master of the poor Carry On was no rival to Paul Celan (1920-1970), the greatest poet of his generation. With skin like leather, leather seemed to be what he had for skin. Captivated beyond control by Barbara Windsor's boobs, the only boob he made was to be captain of a team he could not possibly control. Personally, I prefer Ludwig Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations (1953) better than Carry On Camping (1969), but that may be just because I'm so clever. This much I know: I know so much.

CLIVE JAMES

No book can be read that has not first been written. The greatest genius of his generation has earned the right to look great generating in jeans. The guy recognised for looking brainy on the box is himself now a recognised brainbox; and by boxing with his brains he has brought to book one of the indispensable intellectual works of the century, a book so intellectual as to cause any sentry on parade to raise his bear-skin, but not, we trust, to parade in his bare skin. Unrivalled as a personality, Clive James has personality to rival the – *(continues all the way to page 879)*

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

I WANNA WRITE A SONG ABOUT BRITAIN'S ROLE IN THE SLAVE TRADE, BUT I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT...
WHY WAS SUCH A WICKED AND EVIL THING EVER ALLOWED TO DEVELOP?
TRADE BETWEEN EUROPE, AFRICA AND THE AMERICAS AND THE PROFITS IN COMMODITIES, I BELIEVE, SIR.
LIKE TEA, COFFEE, SUGAR, TOBACCO...
TINKLE TINKLE
TEA, TWO SUGARS AND PASS MY TOBACCO WILL YOU?

Literary Review

That's all Faulks

Engleby

Sebastian Faulks

(Hutchinson, £17.99)

MY NAME is Mike Engleby and I'm a parody. Or do I mean a pastiche? A laborious attempt, at any rate, to imitate a particular style or type: the normal-seeming mad axe murderer. Or in this case, chunk of concrete murderer, since that's my "modus operandi". You don't believe me? (Thought not.) Well, you're not meant to, actually. I'm an unreliable narrator. Now meet my creator.

My name is Sebastian Faulks and, yes, as you so rightly observe, I am indeed a parodist. Or pasticheur. Or piss-taker. My last book proved the point, calling itself *Pistache* and sketching out, in slim volume format, a number of elegant send-ups of other authors' styles or types of work. Martin Amis at Hogwarts. Jane Austen at a rave. Alan Bennett on active service in war-torn Baghdad... Above all, the success of this exercise dependably gives the lie to the lie that I have no sense of humour. Or that I minded so terribly much about winning the Literary Review Bad Sex Award. Which I did.

Mind, I mean. (Though it didn't matter.) And while we're on the matter of mind, I may say that I am now something of an expert. My last, interminable novel, *Human Traces*, was a study of mad-doctors or alienists in 19th century France (see *Eye* 1140). There was a story of course (something about rivals in love and work), but much of it depended on my research into the early history of psychiatry. This was copiously regurgitated, or pastiched, in the course of the novel, to lend it verisimilitude.

I seem to have kept up my psycho-researches, because I'm at it again in this latest book, the one about Engleby, who is arrested many years afterwards for the murder of a female student while he was up at Cambridge. Is he mad or bad? Is he dangerously deluded or just an awkward misfit? That, of course, is for you to decide. But I give you all the evidence, in the form of a rambling self-serving journal, written by Engleby himself, interspersed with extracts from a diary written by Jennifer, his alleged victim, and some pre-trial psychiatric reports and evidence. All these provide different perspectives on Engleby's character, supposedly lending credence to his authenticity as a case study.

Er, yeah, so it's 1973, there's a three-day week (we took a lot of drugs, man, so it's not surprising we can't remember the rest of the time) and I sit in my room in college gloomily listening to prog rock albums and expatiating generally on the fatuity of it all. (I can remember all this from my own student days, of course, but now I'm "in character".) There's this girl I'm keen on, called Jenny. Trouble is, it's clear from her diary and letters home that she doesn't think much of me, referring to me as "Mike (!)" which is not killingly funny at all. But I seem to have forgotten what happened next.

Time for a flashback. I had, of course, a lousy childhood: beaten up by my dad, who then unfortunately died. Still, I got a scholarship to a posh but dreadful boarding school, a latterday Dotheboys Hall of which I give a harrowing but oddly generic account (cold baths, head down the toilet, the usual stuff), and of course Engleby sounds quite like Nickleby so you can see where I might have got the idea from. (Also, as Waugh declared, such schools prepare you for prison, or in my case a secure mental hospital.) Then, after possibly my first murder (the school bully given the concrete block treatment) I get another scholarship to Cambridge. Later, I will get a job as a journalist in London and interview famous people (more scope for pastiche and send-up).

As I keep having to remind the plodding reader, I am very clever, or at any rate intellectually arrogant, which may pass for the same thing Camside, but I am also, and this is the problem with authenticity, with verisimilitude, with unwavering respect for the products of your research, a monumental bore. My cold detachment may be compelling in criminological terms, but it makes me hard to warm to as a narrator. And herein lies a paradox: my unbelievability as a narrator is what makes me believable as a character. Sadly, it is also what disengages the reader.

REMAINDERS OF THE DAY

TITLE: The Blunkett Tapes: My Life in the Bear Pit by David Blunkett

RRP: Originally £25

SPOTTED: At the Pound Store, Grosvenor Shopping Centre, Birmingham.

PRICE: £1.

Best of Young American Novelists 2

(Granta £12.99)

NOWHERE is the absolute OK-ness and right-on-ness of contemporary Americana more emphatically talked up than in the pages of *Granta*.

The tradition goes all the way back to a former editorial savant, Bill Buford, himself a Yank, who gave us, in successive instalments, Dirty Realism, more Dirty Realism and then, in 1996, *Best of Young American Novelists*, an exotic list featuring Jonathan Franzen, David Guterson and a number of other persons still, alas, unknown to the British public.

And here, 11 years later, marches the fat 352-page paperback that is volume two, its contents agonised over for months by a selection panel including Edmund White and Amy Homes, and supposedly nothing less than a blueprint for the next generation of American fictioneers: eclectic, inquiring and all the rest of it. Self-absorption is out, buster! Why a third of the 21 contributors are recent migrants to the States, don't you know, and according to Mr White here "it's as if the conflict and alienation offered in, say, the British novel by encounters with members of other, lower social classes are replaced in America by contrasts of first and third world cultures." Well, hot diggety-dog!

The guff so regularly spouted on these shores about the crystalline promise of the transatlantic prose style is one of the great confidence tricks of English litcrit. What does it amount to here? Searching for some point of contact among these 21 tyros, one can say that a fair number like arresting opening lines. "Once there was a city where everyone had the gift of song" begins Kevin Brockmeier's *Parakeets*. "She can see her breath in the room of her future" runs the absolutely Delphic opening to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Room after Room*. "Today", begins Gary Shteyngart's *From the Diaries of Lenny Abramov*, "I've made a major decision: *I am never going to die.*"

From the prodigious salvo of the opening line there very often follows an exercise beloved of the short-story writer: the conceit (check out Brockmeier's offering, which is about a mute, here in the city of song, who fills his house with brightly plumaged birds, puzzled by his silence, that start imitating the sounds he makes around the place and... you get it?)

The migrant's perspective line is a red herring because all these wide-eyed incomers tend to do is to write about where they come from. Thus *Mother and Son* by Akhil Sharma, whose biographical paragraph insists he came to the US from Delhi in 1979 at the age of eight, has a central character of exactly the same age and background. Daniel Alarcon, originally from Lima, contributes a piece that looks as if it may very well be set in Peru, while Yiyun Li, revealed, not implausibly, as of Chinese descent, sets hers in, well I never...

As for the casts, well, this is the modern American short story, chaps, and quite a lot of us are pretty strung-out and left-field. The best entries, oddly enough, are the most conventional and down-home: Anthony Doerr's tale about a mid-western couple trying to conceive; Maile Meloy's number about a prairie state family who offer a Yule-tide lift to a pair of suspicious-sounding hitchers. But the most crucial unifying factor, against which all others pale into insignificance, is simply educational. Every single one of the *Granta* pack, it turns out, studied creative writing at some American college – four alone went to Iowa, the US equivalent of the UEA – and, boy, does it show.

It shows in the intense literariness, the feeling of huge numbers of books and critical primers passing through a collective creative sensibility that would have done better with straightforward observation of scene. There must, presumably, be other Americas, out beyond the pinioning lariat of the creative writing class, not written up by students and teachers and proud recipients of Faulkner awards, but you won't find them here.

Books & Bookmen

■ MARIELLA Frostrup showed amusing chutzpah in complaining in a recent interview about the hold Melvyn Bragg and Alan Yentob ("those two dinosaurs") have over TV arts coverage. "Melvyn has his territory and I'm sure he's reluctant to cede it," she grumbled.

Amusing, because her hold on broadcast books coverage is just as tight: she presents not just Radio 4's only general books show, *Open Book*, but also – as the big channels have given up – TV's only dedicated

Literary Review continues overleaf

programme, *The Book Show*, on Sky Arts. She's also judged the Booker and Whitbread, hosted the inaugural Costa Awards ceremony and was the queen of the Hay festival, interviewing authors every evening for Sky.

Frostrup, despite her lack of literary background, has actually become the default option for commissioning editors and prize organisers, who appear incapable of thinking of anyone else.

■ WILL Father Michael Seed's forthcoming autobiography answer the question of whether legendary Tory lothario Alan Clark died a Catholic?

Seed, converter of the great and good, is widely believed to be about to claim his next scalp, Tony Blair. But according to the *Daily Mail* on 29 May, he is in trouble with Cardinal Cormac Murphy O'Connor, who believes that the autobiography is one confession too many.

Seed is alleged to have told Clark's widow, Jane, that her husband was received into the Catholic church a couple of months before he died. In the final chapter of Clark's diary, completed by Jane Clark, she writes: "Downstairs and FrM and I to Red Study where he talked and told me Al was a Catholic."

Jane Clark did not believe him, especially as another Catholic priest said prayers over him later as though he wasn't a Catholic, and the Conservative Casanova was buried in the grounds of Saltwood Castle unaccompanied by the rites and ceremonies of Mother Church, but with a bottle of House of Commons whisky at his side.

When the last volume of Clark diaries was published in 2002, Seed was evasive. Asked by a journalist on a Catholic paper, *The Universe*, whether the matter would not be easily provable one way or the other by reference to Westminster Cathedral's records of people received into the church, he huffed: "This matter is covered by the Data Protection Act."

'Bookworm'

LIBRARY NEWS

■ SO. Farewell then to the Laser Foundation, which funded controversial research into the public library service.

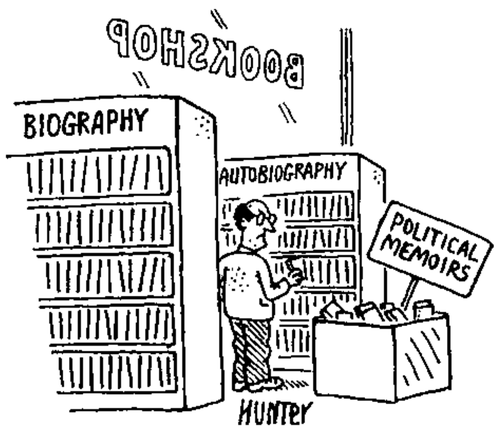
After publishing *Overdue*, which accused libraries of "sleepwalking to disaster", in 2003, and Tim Coates' *Who's in Charge?* highlighting the money wasted in the library system in 2004, Laser was accused of hostility to public libraries. But it has also been responsible for helping libraries around the UK tackle disability access and funding projects such as a national register of literary manuscripts held by public libraries.

Laser was a co-operative founded in 1928 to share resources between libraries in London and the south east. When it closed in 2000, the remaining assets were transferred to a charitable foundation which has funded work to improve libraries. Those funds have now run out.

With the British Library Research and Innovation Centre already long gone, Laser was the only independent body providing grant funding for work in public libraries. Signing off this month with one final report on its work, the foundation concluded that "the future looks bleak".

■ AND farewell too to the six public libraries to be closed by Conwy council as part of its plan to "modernise" library services.

The council says a recent consultation found that people wanted, er, "more zoning of library areas for particular uses". The closures are apparently needed to pay for this zoning (known to the rest of us as "having a children's section") and for more computers.



FIRST DRAFTS

Wilbur Smith

THEATRE NEWS

IN THE *Sunday Telegraph* last weekend, actress Imogen Stubbs was quoted denouncing a critic, unnamed by the paper, who had said he wanted to give her husband, the director Trevor Nunn, "a good kicking."

Why was the *Telegraph* so reluctant to claim credit for Charles Spencer, the theatre critic of its sister daily paper? Anyone familiar with Spencer's writing, even without seeing his recent review of Nunn's *King Lear*, would have known at once who it was.

A few months ago Spencer also wanted to give "a good kicking" to the playwright Nicholas Wright for presenting Spencer with a complicated, uneven play (*The Reporter*, at the National Theatre) to summarise at short notice.

According to a *mea culpa* Spencer wrote in the *Telegraph* after his last-ditch stay at the Priory in 2000, he said that treatment for alcoholism revealed to him that, without realizing it, he had been a very hostile person. *Had* been?

VETERAN theatre critic Michael Coveney, exiled nowadays to the website Whatsonstage.com, launched a bold attack recently on fellow scribe Georgina Brown of the *Mail on Sunday*.

Coveney used his blog to accuse Brown of failing to declare her interest when she was a board member at the Bristol Old Vic. He noted that Brown had been generous in her reviews without telling readers of her connection to the place. "A very poor do," he wrote, "most astonishing."

Can this be the same Michael Coveney who often writes essays for the programmes of West End shows which he then judges as a reviewer, without always mentioning his connection? And can it be the same Michael Coveney who is married to theatre publicist Sue Hyman? Er, indeed it can.

Past productions which have hired Hyman as their publicist include *Festen*, *Sit and Shiver* and *The Last Confession*, shows that certainly made an impression on one critic. *Festen*, for instance, was "a considerable smack in the chops"; *Sit and Shiver* was "a remarkable evening, unlike any other in the London theatre"; and *The Last Confession* was an "old-fashioned, handsomely presented thriller". The name of this generous reviewer? Michael Coveney!

Moissac - A major stop for connoisseurs of Roman art, Moissac was a pilgrims' outpost and today houses an artists' colon.

Easyjet inflight magazine

She sauntered on stage, a wild, cocksure post-Jagger version of the Baudelairian dandy Dietrich impersonated so well. She seemed to be the newest thing on the planet, even though she had pulled herself together using bits and pieces from the past. She performed those two shows with the violent conviction of someone seriously determined to rearrange reality.

PAUL MORLEY on Patti Smith
The Sunday Telegraph

The new stadium dominates the new urban landscape, as a commanding height, but this is not repressive, it represents a flexible and shifting political regime. The roofs represent a liberating social order in which consumers are encouraged to participate in the developing global markets.

PROFESSOR TONY KING on the new Wembley stadium, Exeter University website

On 5 June 1968, just after midnight, Robert Kennedy was shot in my presence at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles.

JOHN PILGER
New Statesman

Pseuds Corner

The central questions gravitate around the cultural implications of the still relatively recent collapse of the Berlin Wall. The taste gap between East and West can be addressed in one of only two ways: radical introversion or a more enthusiastic opening up to the new.

JOHN WATERS, co-writer of the Irish Eurovision entry, attempts to explain why it finished last, *Irish Times*

I see myself as akin to what Baudelaire called the flaneur. They are the thinkers and social commentators who, by their very definition, are the few rather than the many. I wanted to embody the true visual imprint of urban existence in 2007. To be concise and wholly literal...That's how I ended up with black phrases on oversized white T-shirts.

HENRY LLOYD-HUGHES of Garms of London, *i-D Magazine*

Pseuds Corporate

Moving forward, we have taken on 20 customer hosts to bring clarity to the ticket buying process.

First in York managing director RICHARD EAMES announces the hiring of 20 new bus conductors, *York Press*

CONTRIBUTORS: Sheila Parissien, Jon Hall, Simon Jarrett, Bill Crotty, 'Mr Spencer', Peter Reineck.

£10 paid for all entries

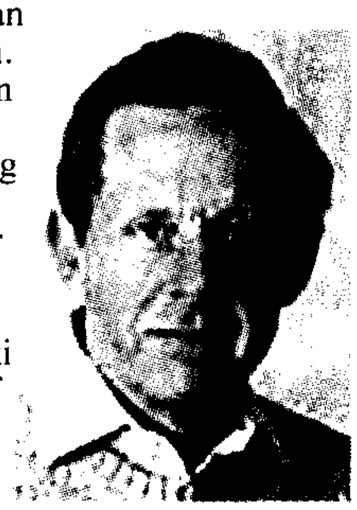
IN THE BACK

BRITISH UKRAINIAN SOCIETY

If you smell gas...

SHADOW Defence Secretary Liam Fox regularly issues warnings about Russian energy giant Gazprom, calling the firm a "matter of concern for foreign governments" with its "political ambitions". But this hasn't stopped fellow Tory MP Richard Spring (pictured) setting up a British-Ukrainian society heavily linked to a Gazprom partner.

Spring was paid £35,000 by the Asquith & Granovski consultancy to help set up something called the British Ukrainian Society. He seems to have taken the cash without asking for whom his new employer was working. The society's board is dominated by people linked to Centragas, a company which makes most of its money through a Ukrainian partnership with Gazprom.



Asquith & Granovski in turn has a contract to help Centragas with "positioning and branding". Both Viscount Asquith, a former British diplomat in Moscow, and his business partner Vladimir Granovski have a seat on the board of the British Ukrainian Society, as does Robert Shetler Jones, a Centragas director. Spring sits on the board too with Labour MP John Grogan.

Centragas pumps natural gas into the Ukraine through a company called RosUkrEnergo, which it jointly owns with Gazprom. The arrangement has been fiercely criticised in the Ukraine by former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko. She now leads Ukraine's parliamentary opposition and described RosUkrEnergo as a "criminal tumour" on the body of her nation's gas supply.

Tymoshenko and her supporters think the arrangement involves the dubious diversion of hundreds of millions of dollars.

But influencing Ukrainian-British political links could help Centragas out-manoeuvre criticism from the Tymoshenko bloc. Centragas's British spokespeople defended it from criticism, telling the *Eye* it helped put the gas trade between Russia and the Ukraine "on a market footing" and helped overcome the "lack of trust" seen in the gas crisis of 2006 when Gazprom cut off supplies.

The *Eye* asked Richard Spring why his new society seemed so closely linked to Centragas, but he denied all knowledge of the firm. Spring said Raymond Asquith had asked him to pull together "an umbrella organisation to encourage political, cultural and economic links between the countries". Even though four of nine directors arguably had links to Centragas, Spring was still unaware of the company. He told the *Eye* that his employer, Asquith & Granovski, had no connection to Centragas. Instead Spring believed Asquith & Granovski was mostly involved in "exporting Ukrainian mud" because of its "special properties".

While Spring may be blissfully unaware of the links between the society he helped set up and the murky east European gas business, a Centragas spokesman confirmed to *Private Eye* that Asquith & Granovski was indeed working for it.

OSNABRUCK BOMBING

The strange case of Roisin McAliskey (cont.)

WHY on earth would the German authorities resurrect one of the most controversial IRA terrorism investigations of the 1990s, by seeking the extradition of Roisin McAliskey, nine years after the first attempt failed and four years after the UK's own Crown Prosecution Service ruled that she had no case to answer?

The arrest in 1996 of Ms McAliskey, daughter of Bernadette McAliskey, the former civil rights campaigner and nationalist MP for Mid-Ulster, for a bungled mortar attack on a British army base in Osnabruck, became a cause-célèbre. She was pregnant, held in the notorious Castlereagh detention centre where she was strip searched no fewer than 75 times, suffered prolonged ill health and for a while was confined to a psychiatric hospital. She gave birth in custody.

As the *Eye* reported, the evidence against her was pathetic to non-existent. The only eyewitness said to have identified her as "Beth", the woman who rented a house for the bombers, denied on German TV that he had ever done so. German police records showed that none of the other witnesses picked Roisin out from photos supplied by the RUC. (One even said she was definitely *not* "Beth".) And German police also claimed to have found her fingerprints but kept changing their minds in successive statements as to where and on what material they had been found. One day it was foil at the house, the next it was cellophane in a lorry 60 miles away.

Prints were never produced and the "evidence" was completely undermined when it was shown that the cellophane could have been moved from Northern Ireland to Germany. Her house had been searched and items passed on to the German police.

At the time of the attack, Ms McAliskey was employed in Dungannon by the government-funded Irish World organization, providing training for the disabled, long-term unemployed and ex-offenders. While she cannot provide an alibi for every hour that the IRA team were seen and said to be plotting the Osnabruck attack, it is clear that for most of the time she was at home in Northern Ireland or at work.

In 1998 Jack Straw, the then Home Secretary, ruled that she should not be extradited because of ill-health. And two years later, in July 2000, the Crown Prosecution Service announced that it had carried out its own detailed investigation and there was no case to answer.

That, it was believed, was the end of the matter... until the end of last month when, out of the blue, Ms McAliskey was arrested. The German authorities were no doubt deciding to take advantage of a move by another Home Secretary, David Blunkett, and his highly controversial European Arrest Warrants (EAW) which removed most of the old judicial safeguards to unfair extradition and injustice.

Under the EAW, the German authority is represented in the extradition proceedings by the Crown Prosecution Service. But how can the CPS have any credibility when it has already ruled there is no evidence to support a case and there is no suggestion of any new evidence?

There is no presumption of bail under the German criminal code and – even if ultimately acquitted – Ms McAliskey could still spend anything up to two years in a high security German prison if extradited.

It may yet be that one of the few protections left to those facing allegations abroad under the EAW may give the UK courts a way out. This concerns the length of time that has elapsed since the crime and whether extradition would now be unjust or oppressive. But the courts might also want to examine the extraordinary timing of the affair. The German application for extradition was dated October 2006. But Ms McAliskey's arrest didn't come until 22 May – just days after the historic agreement to seal Northern Ireland's peace and share power at the newly-devolved Stormont government.

GOVERNMENT WASTE

Bourn to run and run?

AT LAST somebody has picked up on something the *Eye* has been pointing out for years: the National Audit Office's sustained failure to examine whether the hundreds of billions spent on the private finance initiative give value for money.

Labour MP David Taylor, questioning Alan Williams, chairman of the Public Accounts Commission (which holds the watchdog's purse-strings), complained how "continuing abject failures of PFI projects attract little interest from the NAO, whose critiques of these matters are often timid, lame, vacuous apologia for a concept that I devoutly hope the incoming prime minister will promptly abandon".

Not much hope of that, alas; nor of any proper scrutiny to judge by Williams' response. The NAO saves the taxpayer nine times its costs, he claimed without mentioning PFI at all – "clear evidence that it is doing a good job". So that's all right, then.

But why *won't* the National Audit Office (prop: Sir John Bourn) audit the grossly expensive PFI to see if it offers value for money or not? And why was it so limp-wristed condemning the waste of politically high-profile cock-ups like the NHS IT programme?

Serious scrutiny of public spending in Britain seems to have become very comfortable under Sir John's 19-year reign. But then he has been very busy on his travels, speaking at bean-counters' symposiums abroad while attempting to win the record for staying in as many of the world's most expensive hotels as possible (*surely "generating international auditing work for the NAO"? Ed.*)

Nor is there probably much point asking any of his assistant auditor-generals about the PFI oversight. Two of the seven current bunch were previously 73-year-old Sir John's bag-carriers, aka "private secretaries", who accompanied him and his wife on his foreign jaunts and picked up the exorbitant tabs on the NAO credit card (see last *Eye*).

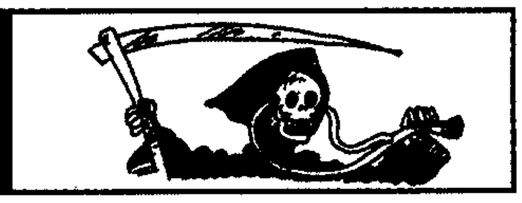
Sir John, who answers to nobody for how he runs the NAO, has an unlimited tenure and as a parliamentary appointee can only be ejected by votes from both Houses. But if word came from the top that he should go, he'd surely be off: so what explains his longevity?

Protected by legislation that gives him "complete discretion in the discharge of his functions", Bourn has steered an astute course. As well as signing off Whitehall's accounts, the NAO produces 60 "value for money" reports each year on subjects entirely of its own choosing. It duly dishes up enough to enable MPs on the public accounts committee (PAC) to give the mandarins the odd satisfying bollocking. But the NAO studiously avoids the big questions and Sir John has long acquiesced in the cosy convention that NAO audits are agreed with the government before being sent to the PAC.

No wonder a survey has revealed that 78 percent of the NAO's own auditors think the organisation is "over-cautious".

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

HEALTH CHECK



Medicine balls

AS M.D. predicted, the junior doctor training scandal is proving more troublesome for the medical establishment than it is for "new" Labour.

Mr Justice Goldring may have declared the process of junior doctor appointments to be "disastrous and flawed", but Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt was not found to be culpable and is pursuing RemedyUK – the self-funding body of juniors – for her (capped) £45,000 costs. While this will not bankrupt Remedy, it should keep them quiet for a while.

Meanwhile the BMA chairman, having failed to appreciate the anger of the "young Turks", has fallen on his sword and the president of the Royal College of Surgeons has – belatedly – resigned from the MTAS review group. None of this will ensure the best doctors get the right jobs come 1 August.

And some won't get jobs at all. "New" Labour has increased medical school places without a commensurate increase in postgraduate training posts or consultant jobs.

This may have been an entirely deliberate ploy to create, in the words of former Labour health guru Julian Le Grand, "a better state of supply and demand", but at £250,000 a doctor it's a very expensive one. To ease the log jam, the government announced in March 2006 that thousands of overseas doctors – who'd been propping up the NHS for years by languishing in sub-consultant grades with no hope of making it to the top – would be regarded for immigration purposes as "in employment" rather than "in training". Many had come to the UK with their families with the promise of long term employment, but most have been sent home, without any marching on the streets.

So while competition is fierce for revamped training grades that will lead to consultant posts (albeit too quickly, with not enough training or flexibility), very few British graduates want to languish in the sub-consultant "corner shop" jobs previously done (extremely well) by overseas doctors. And their parents don't want it either, hence the formation of pressure groups such as Mums4Medics (Mums4Miners anyone?)

The disaster for patients is not that there aren't enough good jobs to go around, but that the wrong doctors will get them. This year sees doctors from the old and new systems of medical training competing for the same jobs. Evaluating any form of education is near impossible, but one way to "prove" the new system is better is to offer selective advantage to those who've been through it. Hence the MTAS application was weighted in favour of those schooled in "self-reflective learning" (bull-shitting about your life experiences) rather than those who'd been out there doing some cutting. Having kicked out the overseas doctors, the NHS desperately needs its most experienced junior doctors, and yet these are the ones who have been most stuffed by MTAS.

The old system of selection was riddled with nepotism and racism, but that's not an excuse to replace it with something worse. Even after a review of MTAS, 10,000 junior doctors are being permitted just one job interview after seven or more years of training. The royal colleges and BMA may be top-heavy with nest-featherers, but many work in the NHS and are belatedly realising the implications of inexperienced junior staff on their own workload (sorry patients). But as with all medical scandals, no one is accepting overall responsibility for fixing it. The chief medical officer and the new Postgraduate Medical Training Board are in denial, the medical establishment is *opting for resignation* and Hewitt is apparently heading for the exit. If you can't go on holiday on 1 August, don't get sick.

M.D.

NHS PLC

It's sick...

THE Department of Health's Commercial Directorate has a long line of cock-ups to its name since the then Health Secretary Alan Milburn set it up in 2003: flogging off health information on the cheap and the floundering flagship "independent treatment centre" policy, to name but two. Why the lamentable record?

The *Eye* has discovered that the directorate, responsible for tasks ranging from buying bird flu vaccine to farming out NHS operations to private companies, is less well-oiled machine than puffing gravy train for consultants.

It started rolling in 2003 with the appointment of the department's first commercial director Ken Anderson from Amey, the builder struggling unsuccessfully to cash in on the hospital PFI programme. The Texan quickly brought in the man who had previously given him a job at Amey, Dimitrios Hatzis, as his strategy director. Then Anderson found jobs for ex-Amey men Sean Kelleher (head of the central clinical procurement programme) and Ty Robinson (chief operating officer).

Hatzis created the Dr Foster health information fiasco (*Eyes passim*), recently described by MPs as a "hole-and-corner" deal paying "no heed whatsoever to the rules". As procurement supremo, last year Kelleher was responsible for the unlawful advert that indicated healthcare commissioning would be outsourced – swiftly and humiliatingly retracted.

Anderson and Hatzis have since fled the scene to profit elsewhere from their efforts privatising health – Anderson to UBS bank and Hatzis to a consultancy. They aren't the only ones cashing in as the Commercial Directorate becomes a haven for consultants and contractors. On similar deals are new director of strategy Conal Timoney, finance director Adam Thynne, policy director Andrea Longhi and head of "commercial solutions" Peter Holt. Even the top guy, Anderson's temporary replacement and ex-PwC man Mike Seitz, is on an inflated consultancy package. He, however, will shortly be succeeded by another businessman, Channing Wheeler from US private healthcare company UnitedHealth (see below).

All told there are 230 "contractors", ie consultants, at daily rates up to £2,000 (against five people employed as civil servants at junior levels). The latest figures available suggest they're on an *average* £228,000 a year each.

The official justification for running the directorate on exorbitant consultants is "the nature of its work within a modern government department" and the need "to terminate contracts at short notice". But the lucky consultants aren't here today, gone tomorrow. All but one of the top brass have been on the gravy train for at least two years.

The big consultancy firms do nicely, too – trousering £38m from the directorate in 2004/05. Among the main winners was AT Kearney, adviser on the "supply chain excellence" programme that led to the sale of the NHS's successful logistics function to private operator DHL. By coincidence, AT Kearney was once home to Dimitrios Hatzis, who brought them in to draw up the programme in the first place!

MAN IN THE EYE

Wheeler dealer

SO WHO is R. Channing "Chan" Wheeler, the man taking over from Ken Anderson to run the NHS Commercial Directorate?

Wheeler's new post is at a higher level than Anderson's, reflecting the fact that he used to be an executive of the US firm UnitedHealth Group where some years his salary hit $9m.

Some commentators, noting how the US health system is far more expensive than the NHS yet leaves many without proper health cover, wonder what "Chan" can bring to Britain. Alas, Wheeler's old firm didn't just work in America's inefficient health system: it repeatedly tried to cheat money from it.

Wheeler was at UnitedHealth from 1996 to 2004, a period marked by hefty fines for corporate misbehaviour. In December 2004, for example, according to the US Department of Justice it "agreed to pay the United States $3.5m to settle allegations that the company defrauded the Medicare program". The company's telephone response unit "knowingly mishandled certain phone inquiries received from Medicare beneficiaries and providers and then falsely reported its performance information".

In November 2001 UnitedHealth paid $2.9m to settle claims that it had falsely charged the US government for patients it claimed were in nursing homes. Auditors checked the records of a random group of UnitedHealth patients and found that almost one in three was not in long-term care at all. In August 2001, the Texas Department of Insurance fined UnitedHealth $1.25m for failing to pay medical claims on time.

Here, Health Secretary Patricia Hewitt welcomed Wheeler to her new "NHS Leadership Team", boasting how the new team would "strengthen the operational grip on finance and performance in the NHS". Shome mishtake, surely?

CASE NOTES

1. Royal Surrey

CAMPAIGNS to save hospitals threatened with closure focus rightly on what will happen to patients. But it may take a new study showing the financial impact the loss of a hospital can have on the local economy to persuade ministers to rethink their muddleheaded health reforms.

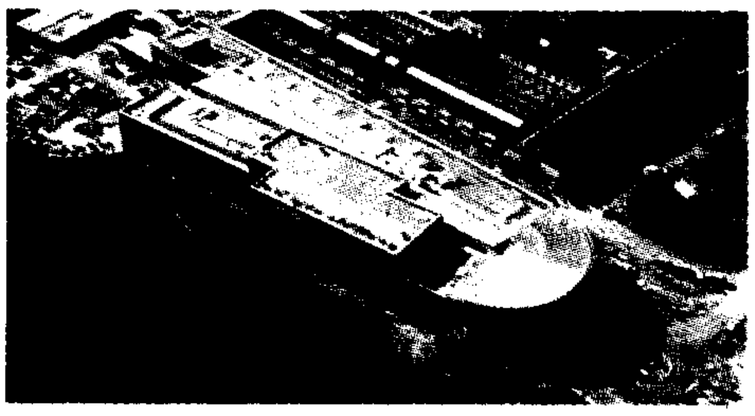
A report by forecasters at Oxford Economics into Royal Surrey County Hospital, facing closure by the South East Coast strategic health authority, paints a grim picture of the possible economic fall-out. The hospital employs 2,283 people in Guildford and supports a further 1,400 jobs in supply and logistics around the country. Ignoring the number of lives it saves, this one hospital alone, through salaries and its purchase of equipment and services, puts more than £117m into Surrey's economy and £150m in to the UK economy as a whole.

Given that 30 district hospitals are under threat around the country, a potential £4.5bn could be lost from the UK economy along with 85,000 jobs.

The SHA, which provides healthcare across the south-east, needs to save around £100m from its NHS budget and closing the Royal Surrey would be one way to balance books. As the report concludes, however, the Royal Surrey is efficiently run: its critical care costs are 20 percent below average; community services more than 50 percent cheaper; and its elective care costs 11 percent below average. As it offers general

services to a population of 250,000 and serves more than a million with specialist cancer care, closure would have a major impact on local health provision too. What price short-term thinking by health chiefs who are in the financial mire?

2. Hinchingbrooke



POPULAR, low-cost Hinchingbrooke hospital in Huntingdon (pictured above) has £14m debts through no fault of its own and faces a potentially fatal quadruple whammy: high PFI costs for its new treatment centre; unfair competition from nearby foundation hospitals; cuts in revenue because of its deficit and those run up by other hospitals; and the Payments by Results (PBR) system which will see £2.3m following patients to the private sector and more going elsewhere.

Though saved from closure by a patients' protest, the hospital faces cuts to A&E and other vital services, losing about 25 percent of its patients (around 42,000 a year) and the axing of some 200 jobs as part of a partial rescue.

However, a report into the downgrading by the London Health Emergency campaign warns that the cuts will only be a temporary reprieve – a pity given that, compared to other district hospitals, Hinchingbrooke is a top performer with better than average use of beds, more outpatients, more day surgery and lower pay costs.

Two years ago it was seen as a great success with the opening of a £22m treatment centre and a £6.5m emergency care centre. But success as a low-cost operator is one of its main problems. It meant its contract for services with what is now Cambridgeshire primary care trust was set according to its lower costs. The Payment by Result tariffs per treatment are set at a significantly higher rate, but Hinchingbrooke, unlike its private and foundation competitors, cannot claim this extra money until 2008. Had the hospital been allowed to claim the full PBR rate, it would be £10m a year better off and no longer in debt, says the report.

The new A&E and treatment centres only add to its woes. The PFI debts – real cost: £93m for a £22m centre – and the failure of other PCTs to refer patients to it, mean the treatment centre is not fully used and is costing a fortune.

3. Sidcup

Even non-PFI establishments that have the misfortune of being *near* a private finance initiative hospital are being shafted by the unfairness of inflexible PFI contracts.

A candid report prepared for the NHS in South East London explains how its two acute hospitals built using PFI – Queen Elizabeth Woolwich (£65m in debt) and Bromley Hospital (£87m) – are in deep trouble because the PFI contracts don't allow them to adapt to government health policy.

When times get tough, as they have for the Queen Elizabeth and Bromley, little can be done about the burden. The private companies behind the deals are still entitled to their cash. But Queen Elizabeth in particular, with only 84 percent bed use, has excess capacity and buildings. So why not sell or rent out some of it to reduce costs? Because the PFI contract won't allow it.

The answer is to make another local hospital pay. Thus nearby Queen Mary's in Sidcup, which does *not* have a PFI contract, faces drastic cuts. Treatment will move to the PFI hospitals to increase their income under the payment-by-results regime so they can pay their PFI bills – regardless of what it means for the residents of Sidcup who will lose services.

MMR

Conflict of interest zone

RED FACES at the General Medical Council (GMC), which next month will decide whether Dr Andrew Wakefield is to be struck off for allegedly failing to declare a conflict of interest between his research and his role as an expert in the MMR litigation.

The man chosen to chair the GMC's disciplinary panel deciding Dr Wakefield's fate and that of two of his former colleagues at London's Royal Free Hospital, has an unfortunate clash of interest of his own.

Prof Denis McDevitt, a clinical pharmacologist, once sat on the government advisory committee that looked at adverse reactions to vaccinations and immunisations and considered issues of MMR safety. He attended meetings that discussed warnings from other countries about an early form of the triple jab, using the Urabe strain of mumps virus, which caused encephalitis and meningitis.

Despite warnings and the fact that this vaccine had already been withdrawn in Canada, the Urabe-containing jab was introduced in the UK in 1988. After it caused meningitis and encephalitis in children, it was finally withdrawn in 1992 and replaced with the safer – and more expensive – MMR II. (*Eye* readers may recall how the drug manufacturers off-loaded their dodgy vaccine to Brazil where a hospital in Salvador was said to have been "saturated" with encephalitis cases.)

Some of the 12 children whose medical history featured in the controversial 1998 *Lancet* paper, drawn up by Dr Wakefield and his colleagues and which suggested a possible link between the jab and bowel disease and regressive autism, had received the Urabe-strain vaccine – as indeed had some of those children in the high court litigation with manufacturers.

In fact another embarrassing clash of interest has arisen in the law courts too. Parents who claimed their children were damaged by the vaccine have complained that Mr Justice Davis, the judge who in 2004 sanctioned the withdrawal of legal aid, should never have sat on the case. His brother, Sir Crispin Davis, is a non-executive director and shareholder of Glaxo SmithKline, one of the defendant drug companies in the litigation. The loss of legal aid effectively scuppered the claims of most of the 1,000-plus families who were suing.

A spokesman for Mr Justice Davis said that "the possibility of any conflict of interest arising from his brother's position was not raised with him and did not occur to him. If he was wrong, any possible remedy must be sought from the court of appeal."

Meanwhile, back at the GMC the *Eye* asked if Prof McDevitt was being removed from the disciplinary panel. A spokeswoman said the composition of panels was never discussed ahead of hearings, but that "as with any case we will have satisfied ourselves that there is no conflict of interest for any of the panellists". We assume that means he will not now be sitting. Watch this space.

MOD ACCOMMODATION

UK land farces

THE atrocious condition of defence housing was laid bare last month when Ministry of Defence officials were hauled before the public accounts committee (PAC) for a grilling on the subject.

Top MoD mandarin Bill Jeffery was forced to admit that 40 percent of accommodation was indeed "sub-standard" and that his job now was "undoing some years of neglect". His colleague Vice-Admiral Tim Laurence, aka Mr Princess Anne, head of Defence Estates, exposed the false economy of skimping on essential maintenance when he said he wasn't surprised that servicemen were leaving the forces in droves because of grotty accommodation: 40 percent of those quitting the services cited ropey housing as a reason.

Even with a bit of extra cash going in after the recent public outcry, it will take 25 years to upgrade 19,000 substandard houses. Meanwhile health remains at risk as there are only half the required safety engineers, a situation so desperate that Labour MP Alan Williams thought it might be helped by a spot of ambulance-chasing.

"Perhaps some of the no-fee litigation people who are trying to milk money out of the National Health Service should actually do us a social service by turning their attention to any incidents in the accommodation for which you are responsible," he cheekily suggested.

Bathroom mildew at Arborfield barracks

The MoD's commitment to resolving the scandal remains parsimonious at best: an extra £17m for upgrades and £35m for new boilers, redecoration etc this year, most of which is coming from already over-stretched armed forces budgets. In the same year, more than £1bn, 20 times as much, will go on 47 separate PFI projects, while a similar amount disappears in the Iraqi desert.

One of the top brass, on the other hand, is set to profit handsomely from the MoD's estate. Colonel Gordon Shipley, deputy chief of staff at the Defence Academy in Shrivenham on the pleasant Wilts/Oxon border, earlier this year bagged himself some prime land from his employer when the Academy put up three quarters of an acre for auction.

Strangely the sale was only advertised in a local Swindon paper and attracted little interest when it was put under the hammer in London. Shipley duly acquired the plot, large enough to build three expensive homes in the desirable village. An MoD spokeswoman would only say that its Defence Fraud Analysis Unit is investigating.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

■ **LEGAL AID**: Forced to defend the government's legal aid "reforms" which will leave the poor and most vulnerable without representation, Martin Seel, director of the Legal Services Commission in London, sought to reassure the capital's residents.

"There is no shortage of legal aid available," he said, claiming that 90 percent of legal aid solicitors had signed up to a new contract. "This is more than sufficient for us to continue to provide high quality legal advice. I would like to thank those skilled and dedicated advice providers who share our commitment to Legal Aid."

What Seel didn't mention was that many of those "dedicated advice providers" signed the contract openly under protest while challenging the reforms in court, amid fears that many law firms will go out of business. Nor did Steel mention their "commitment to legal aid" has been rewarded with a pay freeze for the past 10 years. A similar freeze was not, of course, imposed on barristers like Vera Baird QC – the minister for legal aid.

In the City

PATRICK MEEHAN, chairman of film makers HandMade, garnered a great deal of publicity last month with his announcement of plans to remake the 1980 London gangster classic *The Long Good Friday* in Miami. HandMade, then owned by Beatle George Harrison, produced the original, which made a star of Bob Hoskins as the London gang boss taking on the Mafia and the IRA.

Meehan acquired the HandMade business and library in 1999 and a year ago injected it into AIM-listed Equator Group, subsequently stepping out of the shadows to become chairman. Meehan had previously been merely a consultant to Equator despite being one of the controlling shareholders via an offshore family trust.

The real world of gangsters and extra-curricular business methods is not entirely unknown to Patrick Meehan, whose CV provided to the City when he became chairman of HandMade does not do justice to a colourful career in the music industry before he discovered movies.

Meehan – 59 this month – is best known as the former manager of heavy metal pioneers Black Sabbath, whom he lured away from their original manager with the aid of Wilf Pine, a self-confessed hoodlum and proud associate of real life gangsters both in London (the Krays) and New York (the Genovese crime family).

Meehan's activities in the music business brought him to the attention of *Private Eye* on several occasions in the 1970s and 1980s before he took himself off to live in the Caribbean. Sadly, all the City was reminded of from those far off days apart from Black Sabbath was his role at Equity Enterprises – the David Frost venture which took over film makers Hemdale. The more interesting details of that relationship were omitted. As were his activities before and after Equity/Hemdale.

Meehan, who trained as an accountant, came into the music business as a result of his father's association with pop manager-promoter Don Arden who revelled in his fearsome reputation for tough tactics. The Meehans formed their own management business, World Wide Artists Management, and were joined by Pine, who had worked as an "enforcer" for Arden, after he helped sign Ozzy Osbourne and friends. Meehan and Pine were later sued by Black Sabbath's former manager.

Pine tells how he "nicked" Black Sabbath and his dealings with Arden and Meehan in *One of the family – the Englishman and the Mafia*, a highly favorable and selective life story published in 2003. Pine told author John Pearson, chosen because of his definitive book on the Krays, that in 1971 he swapped a position as co-manager of the band in return for a position working for Meehan and World Wide. "And that is how the golden years of Wilf Pine's life of crime in the music business started," Pearson writes.

Just what role Pine played was illustrated by music trade mag *Melody Maker*. Three reviewers received telephone calls from Pine threatening to "break their legs" after writing unflatteringly of World Wide artists. The Edgar Broughton Band – with whom Pine worked – went to the police over one row with World Wide.

"These interest rate rises are really beginning to bite"

Pine details how his friend in the Genovese family, high-level mobster Joe Pagano, became interested in World Wide and Hemdale. Pagano's interest was picked up by the New York State police who alerted Scotland Yard.

The World Wide-Pagano connection was revealed by *Private Eye* in 1974. .

Pine in his book claims a Pagano associate, Irwin Schiff – a 350lb con artist known as "The Fat Man" – had discussions with Meehan about a $6m takeover bid for World Wide. According to Pine, Meehan was hot to trot but the deal fell through when the Equity stock market listing was pulled in 1975 because of its financial problems. Pine believed the mob's real target was getting control of Hemdale. Schiff had also been offering to help Hemdale fund the 1974 "Rumble in the Jungle" heavyweight title fight in Zaire between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali.

The 1975 problems at Equity, says Pine, also ended his involvement with Meehan and World Wide. Schiff continued living the high life as an associate of organized crime, conman and FBI informant until "The Fat Man" was the victim of a mob hit in a Manhattan restaurant in 1987 for which three Genovese figures were jailed.

In 1972 Meehan had sold World Wide to Hemdale (before it was taken over by Equity Enterprises) for an initial £245,000 with further payments geared to future profits. In 1975 the business was sold back to Meehan by Equity for just £25,000. There was a subsequent legal action brought by the new owners of Equity.

Meehan's post-World Wide career was also controversial. He was involved with another Beatles-linked business, Nems Records, which collapsed in 1982 with debts of more than £600,000. There were other music business failures.

As a result Meehan's rep in the music biz was less than enviable. Black Sabbath founder member Tommy Iommi told a music magazine in 1988 after they had split from Meehan: "The situation with Patrick was unworkable. We could never find him when bills had to be paid." Some highly derogatory comments were made about Meehan on the vexed issue of unpaid royalties by former Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham in a 2001 interview.

Meehan could justifiably say that the views of his rivals are partial and unreliable, if not untruthful. Doubtless he vehemently disagrees with the exaggerated and selective recollections of his former clients and Wilf Pine.

After retiring to sell villas in Antigua, Meehan vanished from the City radar until 1999 when he reversed Equator Films into an AIM-listed vehicle renamed Equator Group. By then Meehan had acquired the rights to the HandMade library. But Equator was not a great success. The company made a series of losses – £5.5m in 2003 – and by 2004 the shares were down from over 50p in 1999 to 6p. Another £1m loss was recorded for 2005 before Meehan orchestrated the injection of HandMade in return for shares worth £16m and a 50 percent stake in the larger group. The Meehan shares are held through a company in the British Virgin Islands. Since that deal the shares have failed to perform – they are now around 23p against a placing price of 32p.

But Patrick Meehan has achieved what he set out to do more than 30 years ago when he told an interviewer: "My ambition is to be very wealthy."

Number crunchings

£3,500,000

■ "budget gap" for which Hertfordshire Police Authority is requesting a 5% increase in council tax

£350,000

■ amount Hertfordshire Police have spent investigating complaints about Big Brother in last six years

HOW generous of the WPP board to agree to pick up the estimated £1m legal tab for chief executive Sir Martin Sorrell's libel and privacy action against former Italian senior executive Marco Benatti. Advertising's very own Napoleon settled the case earlier this year after receiving £120,000 from Benatti's company.

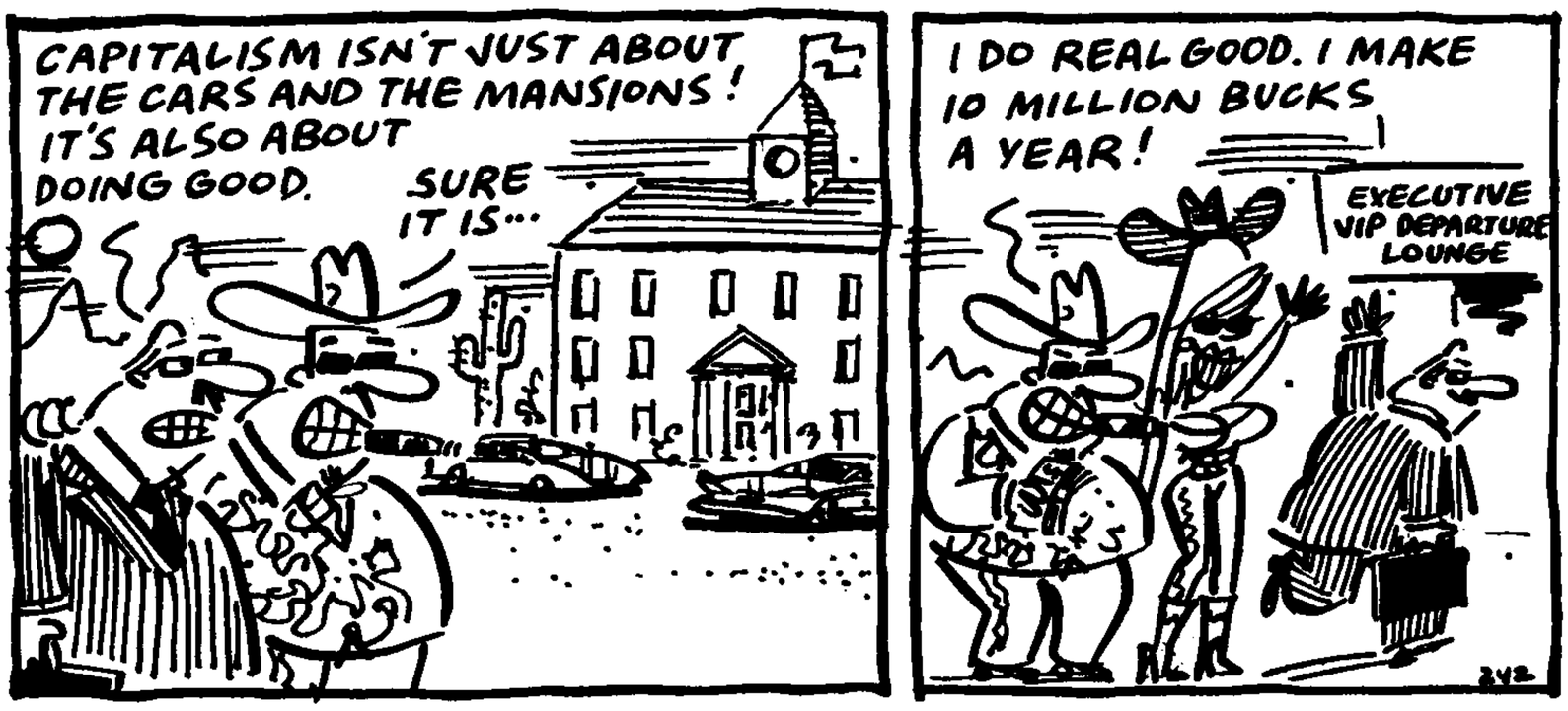
The legal bill is expected to increase as there are still proceedings in Italy and the WPP directors have agreed to pay everything instead of a share, as was initially declared. What WPP shareholders should ask is whether the company will now receive the £120,000 paid to Sorrell so far and any future compensation, when it was agreed that WPP should pay the chief executive's legal bills (was that the deal before the settlement under which presumably each side paid their own costs?) and whether, if the trial had concluded in an even larger cheque to Sorrell, WPP would have received all or any of that payment? Depending on those answers, this otherwise looks very much like a subservient board agreeing to see things in the best interests of a dominant chief executive rather than those of the company and shareholders.

THE planned £15bn flotation of RUSAL, the world's largest aluminium group in London later this year will raise some testing questions for City regulators and advisers J.P.Morgan Cazenove and Credit Suisse.

How to explain why chief executive and major shareholder Oleg Deripaska is once again banned from visiting the United States? His visa was withdrawn some months ago. He is said to have been less than candid about his past business associates whom the Americans accuse of links to Russian organized crime. And how to decide whether or not Deripaska owns the up to 20

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG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SURE IT IS...
I DO REAL GOOD. I MAKE 10 MILLION BUCKS A YEAR!
EXECUTIVE VIP DEPARTURE LOUNGE

percent of RUSAL claimed by his former business partner and mentor, Michael Cherney? Cherney – who is also banned from entering the US – claims Deripaska did not pay in full following a 2001 agreement to buy out his shares.

Cherney is suing in London – where the case was initially thrown out by the high court on procedural and jurisdictional grounds but an appeal is likely – and is looking to sue elsewhere. Despite the US problems both Deripaska and Cherney are very welcome here.

Planet Football: Leeds United

FORMER chairman Ken Bates' plan to buy the now relegated Leeds United from the administrators was duly supported by the supposed largest losers – the offshore trio of Forward Sports Fund (Switzerland), Astor Investment Holdings (BVI) and Krato Trust (Nevis) – despite leaving creditors with just 1p in the £.

KPMG insists there is no evidence that connects Bates' three offshore allies either to each other or him. Quite so: even though Astor was until recently an investor in Forward. Astor, the biggest creditor having apparently now bought out Forward and Krato, is run from Guernsey. One of the investors in Forward is Guernsey accountant Patrick Murrin whose Rivoli company, it emerged, had made a loan to Leeds, repaid before the club crashed.

Those who recall events at Chelsea before the Abramovich takeover – which gave Bates £17m – may think this all sounds familiar. In addition to the shares sold by Bates – from a BVI company run from Guernsey by Murrin – there were blocks of Chelsea shares also held by two companies in the BVI and others in the Cook Islands, Samoa and Mauritius but also run from Guernsey by Murrin's trust company. The beneficial owners were never revealed. All backed the Abramovich deal and sold with Bates.

A two-year investigation by the Fundamentally Supine Authority was unable to establish who owned these shares and whether there was an undisclosed concert party. The FSA concluded that while they "established to a requisite standard that Mr Bates did not own any shares in the five offshore companies… We did not form a conclusive view as to whether Mr Bates had any degree of control over the five said companies and if so the extent of any such control". Following an investigation by the Guernsey regulator, Murrin retired from the trust company which had managed the offshore companies.

Four years later the fate of Leeds may now be decided in the courts. Whether Bates is the right man to continue to run a football club does not appear to concern the football authorities but then on Planet Football that question is almost oxymoronic.

Newcastle United

NEWCASTLE fans would do well not to welcome as a saviour Sports Direct founder Mike Ashley given what has happened to investors in his sports shop chain. The shares are now almost a third below the price at which the company was floated in February.

Ashley – a man whose aversion to publicity and meeting outsiders makes the famously private Sir Tweedle Dee and Sir Tweedle Dum Barclay look like Paris Hilton – took more than £900m from the public and then stuck two fingers up.

What has happened at Sports Direct – whose chairman quit last week over Ashley's attitude – shows how powerless the City is to control those who refuse to play by the supposed rules. But then Ashley's advisers Merrill Lynch with Citibank and Credit Suisse did very well from stuffing clients and the public with Sports Direct shares despite the warning lights about the Ashley attitude.

Whether Ashley will be any more concerned in the interests of Newcastle fans than Sports Direct shareholders or intends to appear in the premiership goldfish bowl seems unlikely.

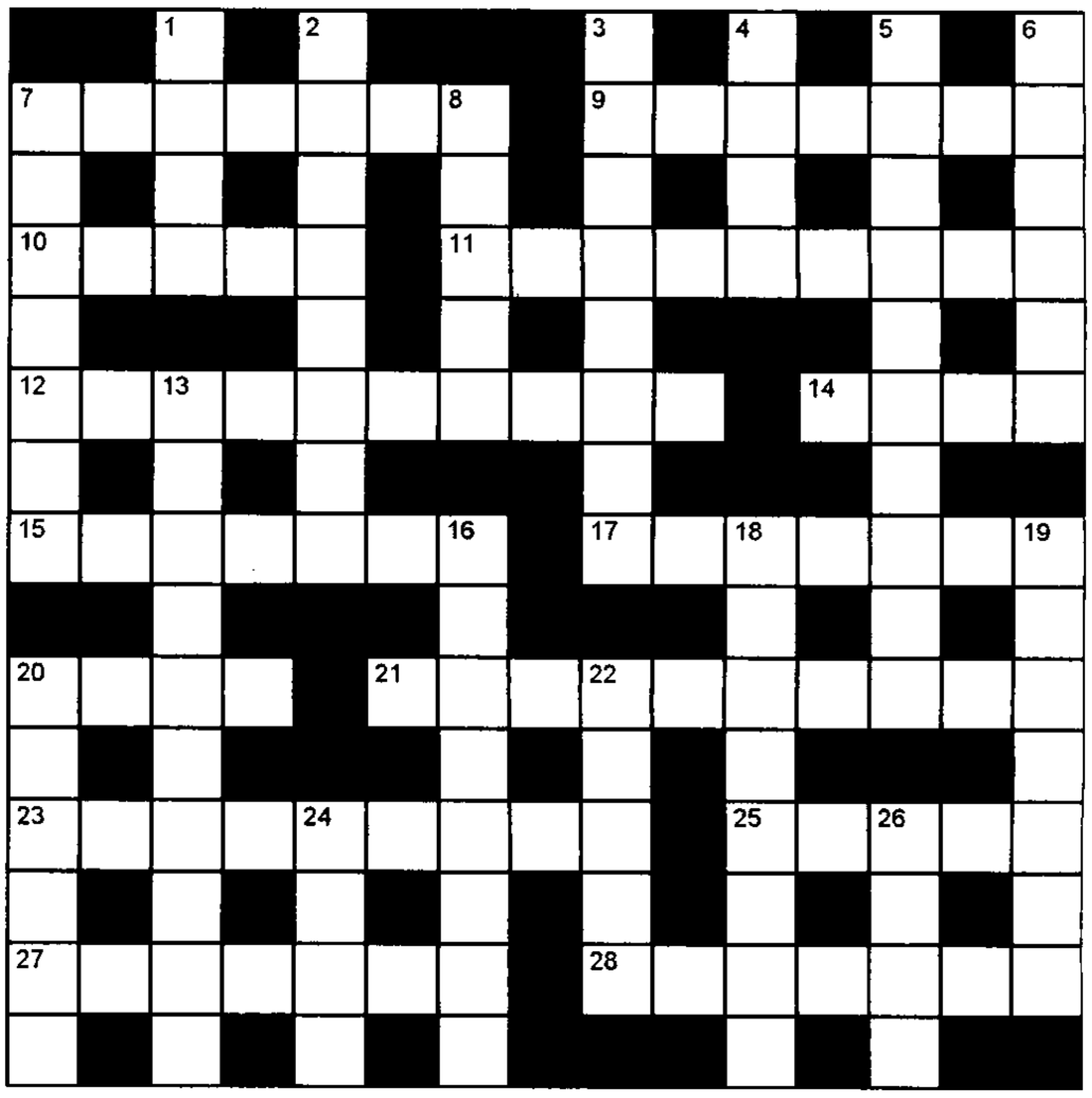
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 341

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 15 June 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

7 Mo bets Dotty is getting head from Robin Hood ... (7)
9 ...Nigel's off getting gobbled by a cold Divine (7)
10 Colt possibly starts to gyrate, ejaculating a sticky mess (5)
11 'Ming' element of political leader not quite accepting acknowledgement of tabloid editor once (9)
12/28 Control on competition didn't happen, to Brown's relief (10,7)
14 Pop group consists of a group of alcoholics restraining two bastards, euphemistically (4)
15 Overpaid bosses owning a corporation on show (3,4)
17 It shows the error of sticking arse in between expressions of hesitation (7)
20 Hand-picked, hard boiled member of Bush's team? (4)
21 Monica finally taking Bill's lead on what happened to her dress – that won't increase the vote (10)
23 Tip of crabby member blue? Withdraw! (5,4)
25 Oliver's not hard when Rex enters (5)
27 An opportunistic union explained in terms of such discussions? (7)
28 See 12ac.

DOWN

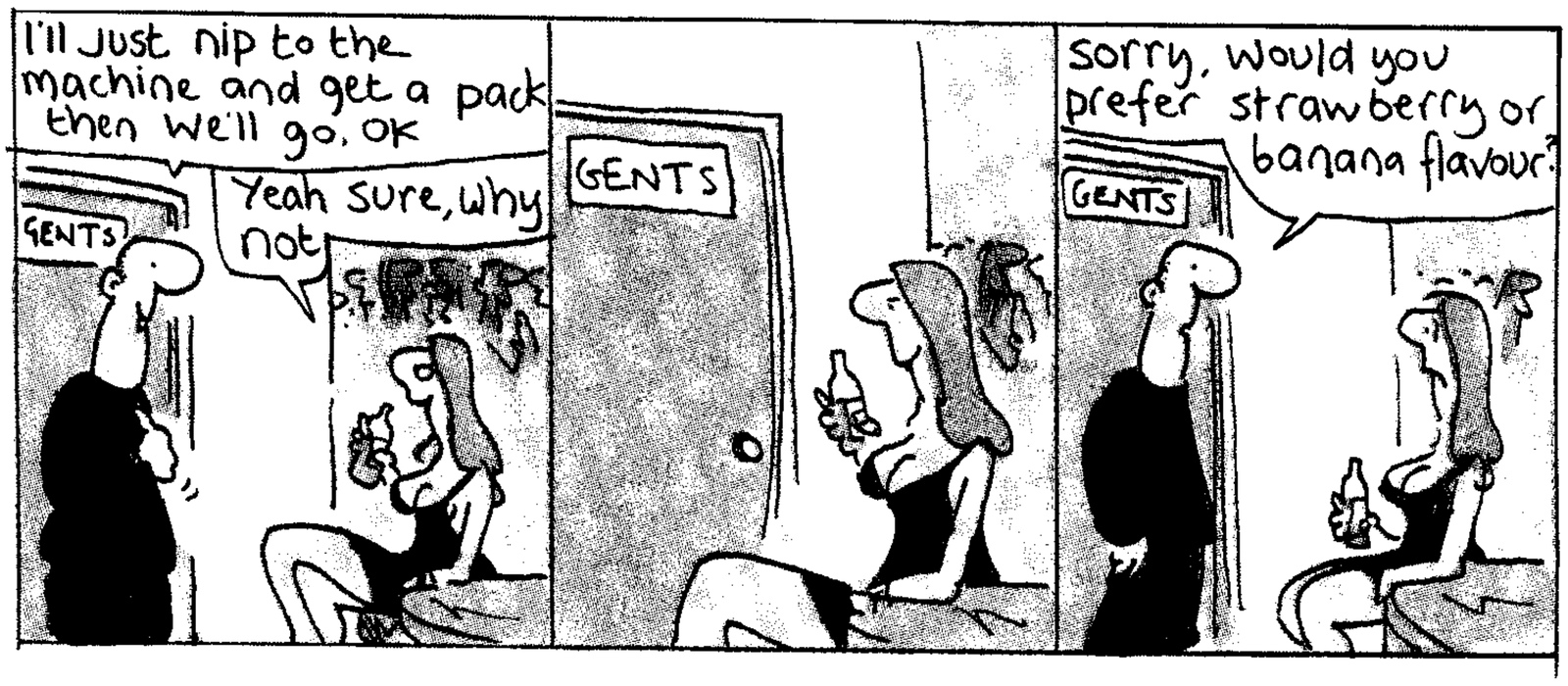
1 *Eye* recognition of arse-lickers imbibing a port (4)
2 Where Napoleon croaked: "Bugger the sane left inside!" (2,6)
3 Atrocity that's unconventional (3,5)
4 Sweats on a leading Tory blowing top (4)
5 Our Brenda lets one drop, being an Essex woman once, you might say (9,1)
6 Edwina Currie: zany, exciting, moody, always tops? Actually, a superficial, most irritating thing (6)
7 More than half of Al-Fayed mug shot for a Mediterranean resort (7)
8 Parties of Right getting round politicians (5)
13 Tina sadly coming to see what Labour's Millennium celebrations turned out be (10)
16 Writ issued by inferior ghost writer? Name one (8)
18 Pissing broadcast "doing a Brenda" (8)
19 Suckers want sexy cop picture starring Hugh Grant? (3,4)
20 Arsehole's drink taken without stirring etc. (6)
22 Shirty thing, Cameron's no.1, after a loony turns up (5)
24 Wow, embracing date gets you stiff! (4)
26 Grass a cabinet minister on air (4)

Crossword 340 winner: PETER NORTH

ACROSS: 8 Outskirts 10 Loser 11 Set up 12 Elbow-room 13 Bastard 15 Repress 17 Drive-by shooting 20 Fascist 22 Calumny 23 Handcuffs 25 Finer 26 Expel 27 Spearhead.

DOWN: 1 Not so bad 2 Statistics 3 Skip 4/25 Friendly fire 5 Blow-up doll 6 Oslo 7 Crumbs 9 Sober 14 Abe Lincoln 16 Evil-minded 18 Huckster 19 Gay Pride 20 Fuhrer 21 Toffs 24 Nope.

HUSBAND


I'll just nip to the machine and get a pack then we'll go, ok
Yeah sure, why not
GENTS
GENTS
Sorry, would you prefer strawberry or banana flavour?
GENTS

OM SAI RAM

A fitting end to the ill-fitting British suit

A suitable man to spark a men's clothing revolution

Consider this proposition. Would you rather pay the same sum for a single, off-the peg, chain store suit cut by a computer and sold to you by a spotty boy who thinks side vents are to be found on a Lambretta scooter, or for two bespoke, custom cut, hand-stitched suits, measured and sold to you by a man for whom suits are a lifetime's passion?

The British clothing chain store has a lot to fear from ***Mr. Raja M Daswani*** of Kowloon. If there were a global ambassador for men's suiting, Mr Daswani, who owns and runs Hong Kong's biggest tailoring business, would be that man. He and his family team measure and make hundreds of suits a week for discerning clients across the world.

Indeed, so successful is ***Mr. Daswani***, that – a little unnervingly as he is measuring you up – he freely admits he doesn't really need to work any more: 'My team is as experienced as I am. But I just love men's suits and I wouldn't feel right sitting at home. It's not a business. It's a mission.

'I love seeing customers walk in a really bad suit that cost them a fortune and walk out in one of our suits that's perfect in every way, made with a good heart in a superior fabric for a half or a quarter as much.'

The price of a Daswani shirt and suit are astonishing. We are talking from £19 (£25 including tax and duty) for a custom shirt and £129 (£169 including tax and duty) for a fully lined, made-to measure suit in a lightweight wool or linen, to £250 (£325 including tax and duty) for a 100 per cent wool, entirely hand finished suit in a British cloth, with every refinement from handmade button holes to knee lining. Even the most expensive suit, made in deluxe superfine wool for £1,500 (£1,950 including tax and duty), costs a third less than it would on **Savile Row**.

Raja Daswani may be based in Hong Kong, but his sartorial mission to the badly dressed and overpaying British customer brings him to the UK as often as once a month. He and his team take over hotel suites in major cities, so British customers can make an appointment and get the full Kowloon Monty.

Measurements and digital photos are taken here and emailed to Hong Kong. Often, your suit will be started on by a tailor 6,000 miles away before you've even left the hotel. You can have it couriered within a week or so, or wait for a second fitting when the Raja team hits your town again a few weeks later.

It now remains to see whether the Raja revolution, with its inspired mix of artistic flair, entrepreneurial genius and digital technology, will see the end of the off the peg British chain store suit. On price alone, it's a sartorial solution that will even please the Suits in accounts.

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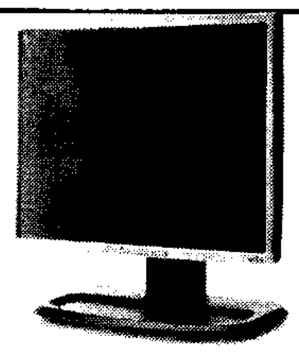

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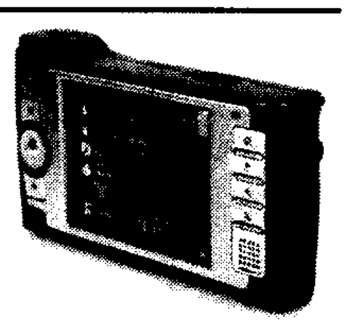

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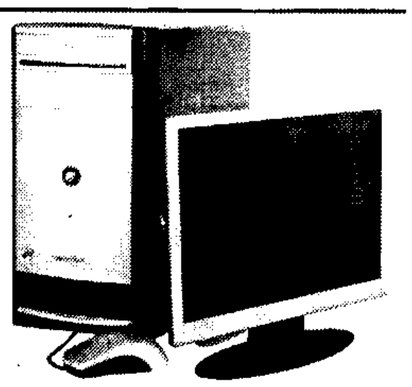

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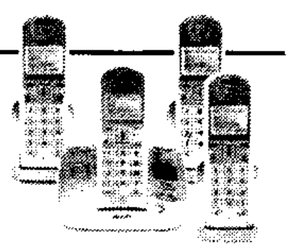

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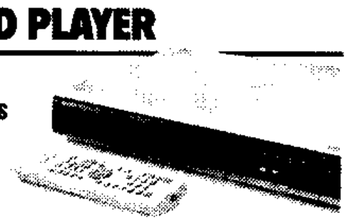

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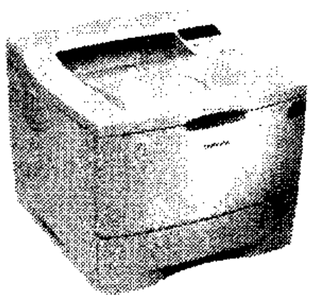

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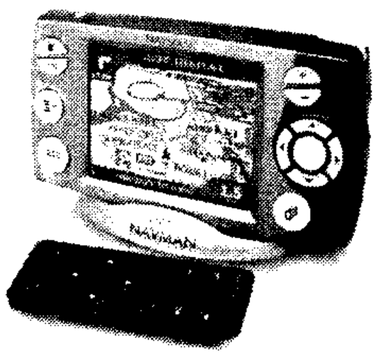

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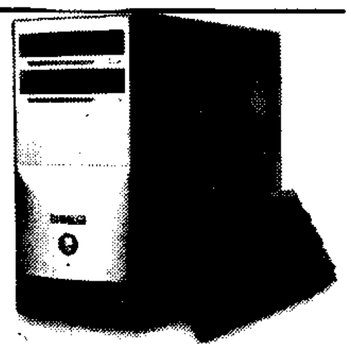

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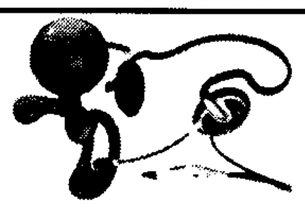

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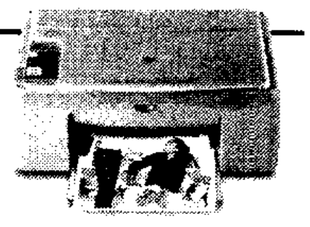

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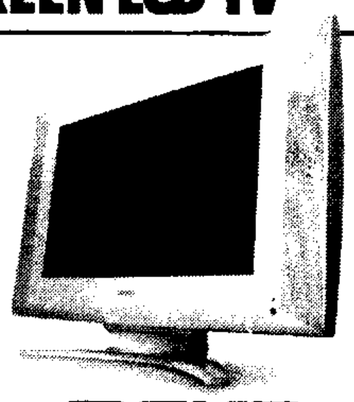

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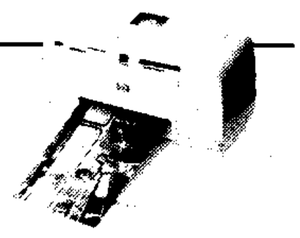

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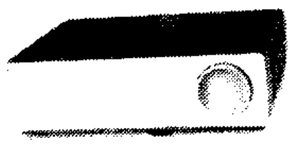

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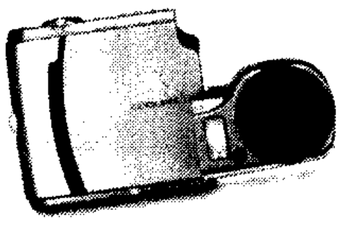

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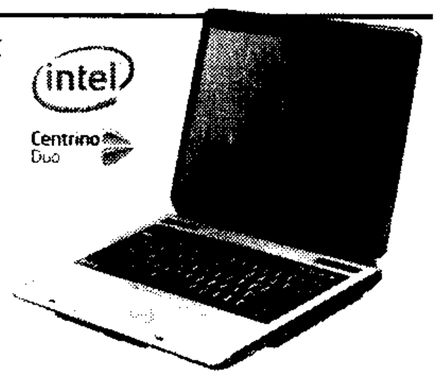

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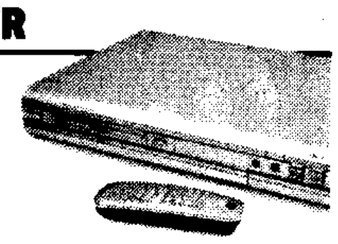

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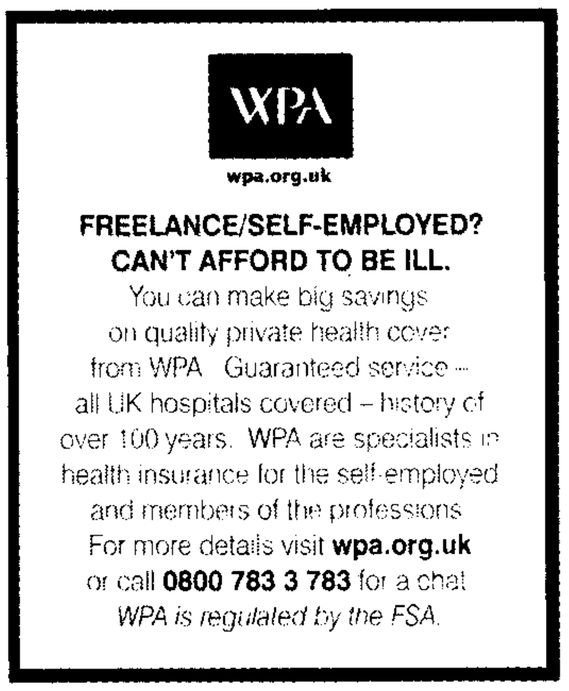
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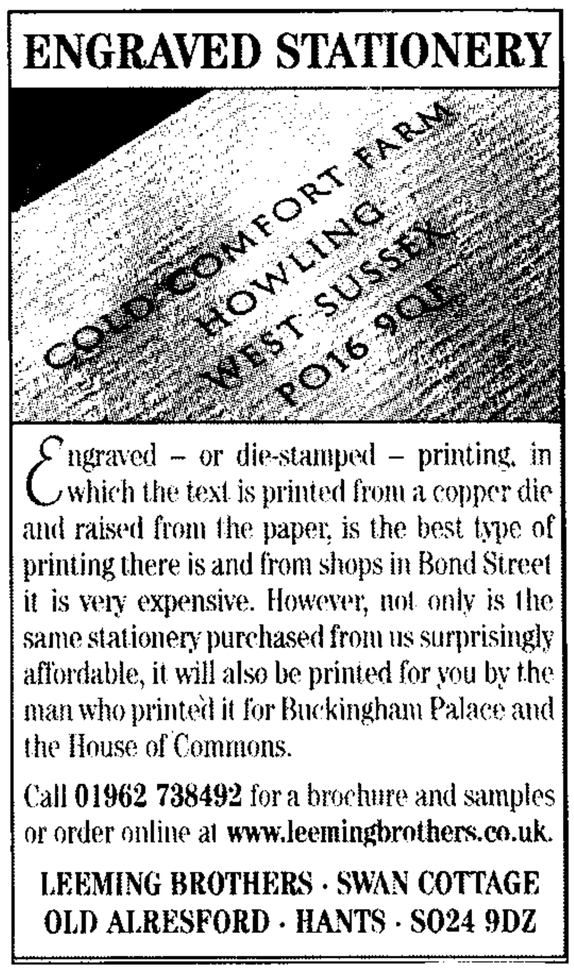
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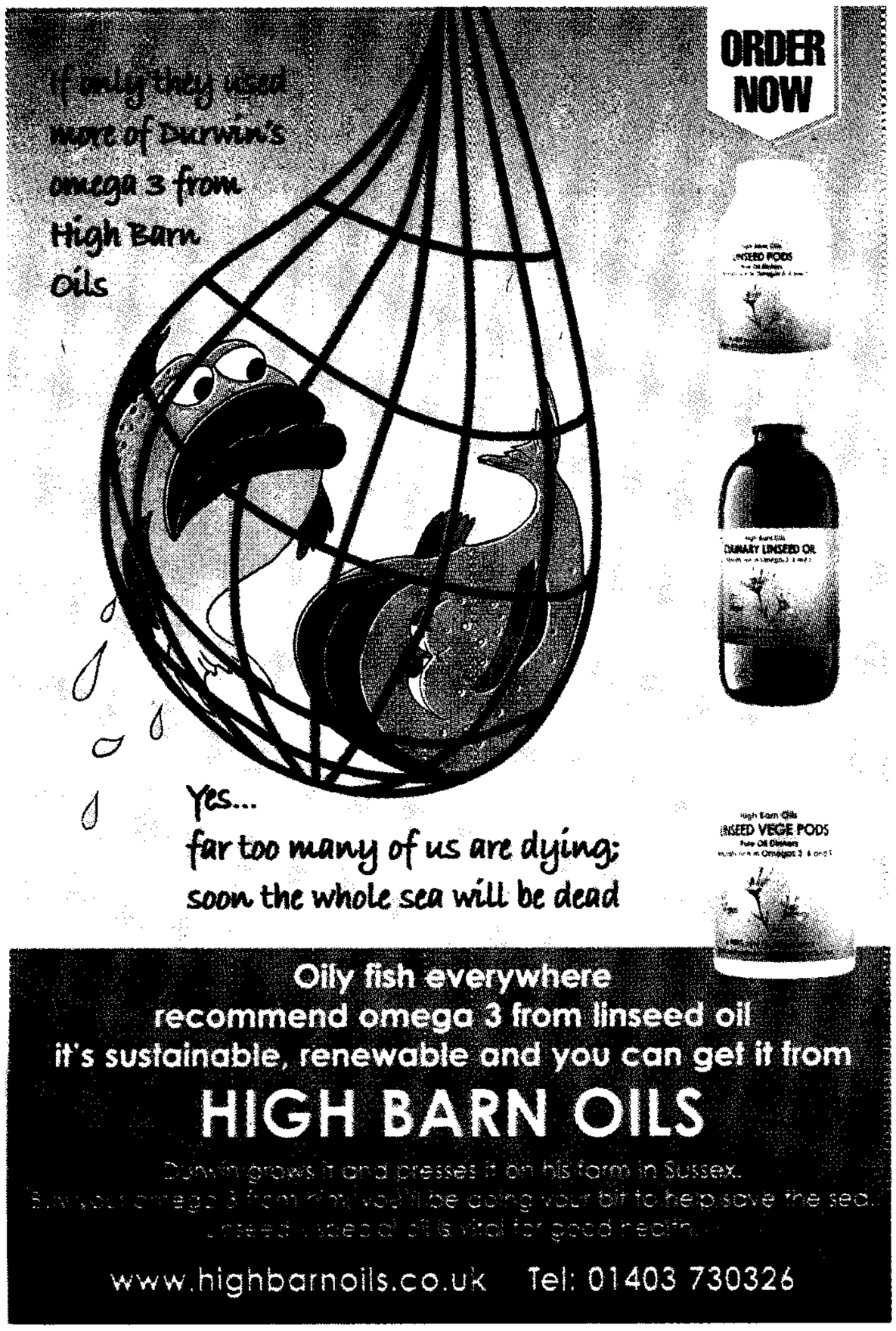
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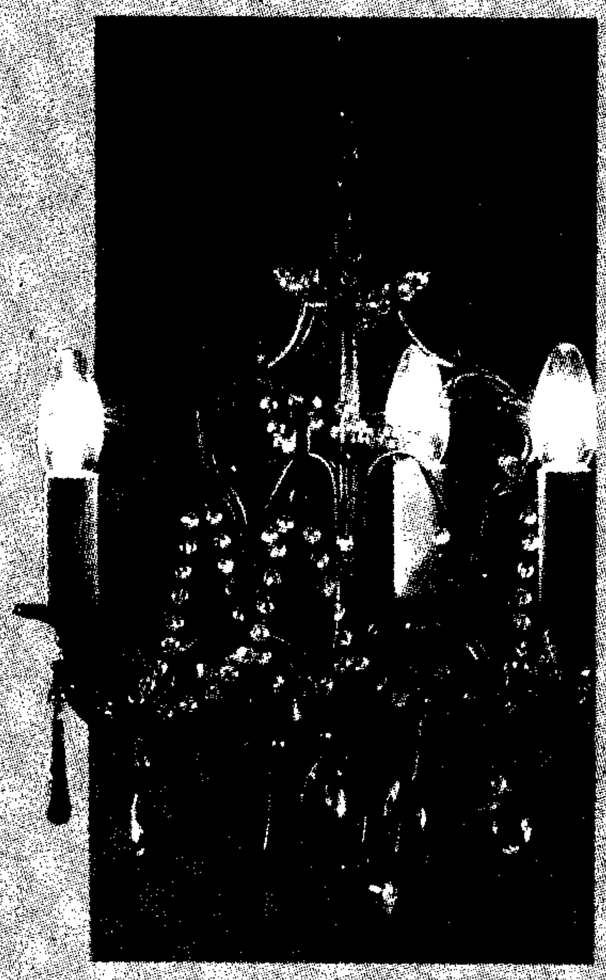

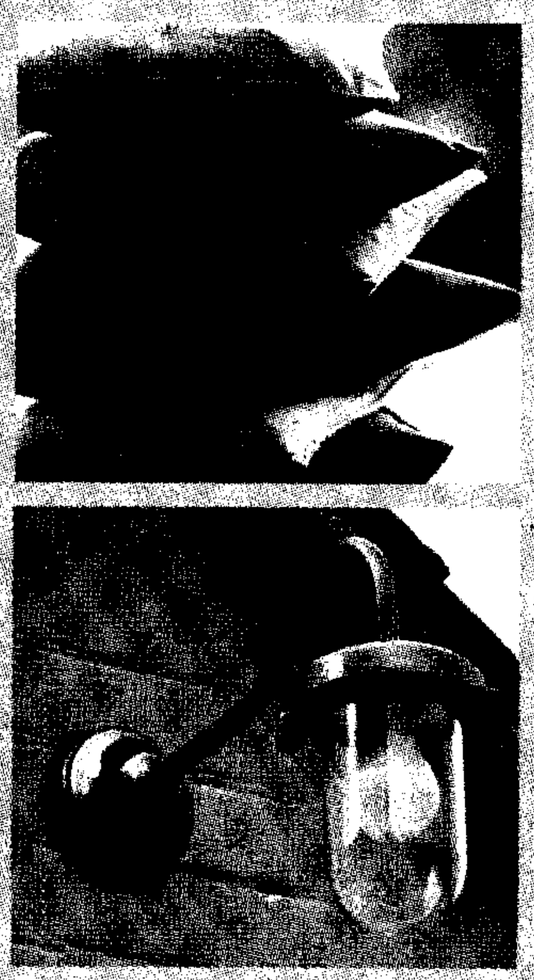
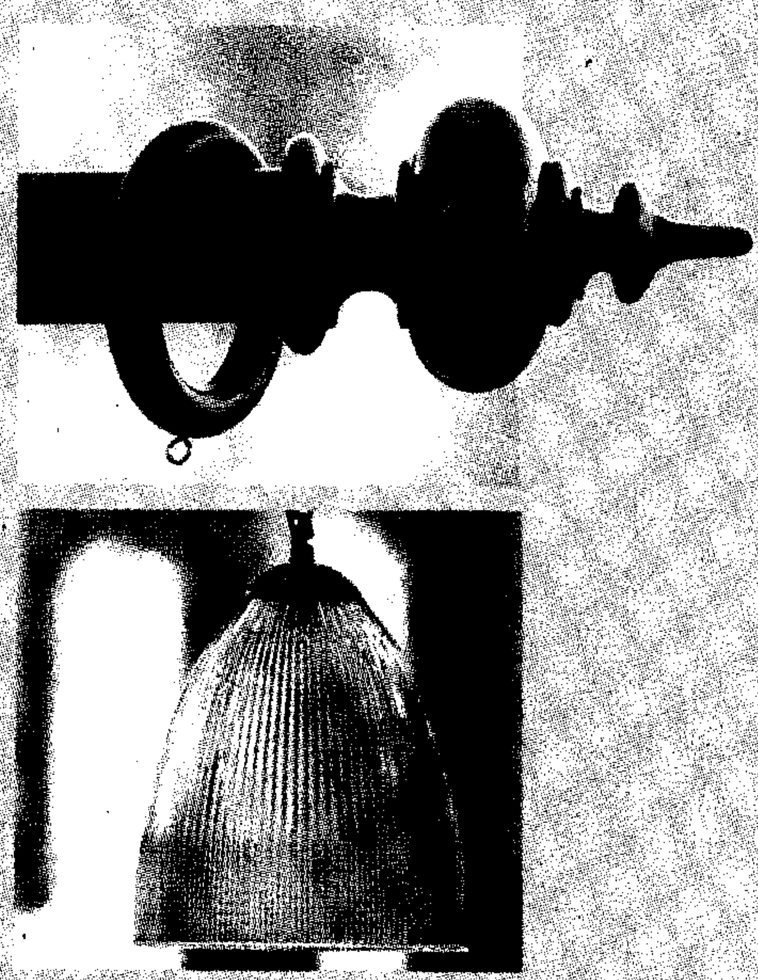
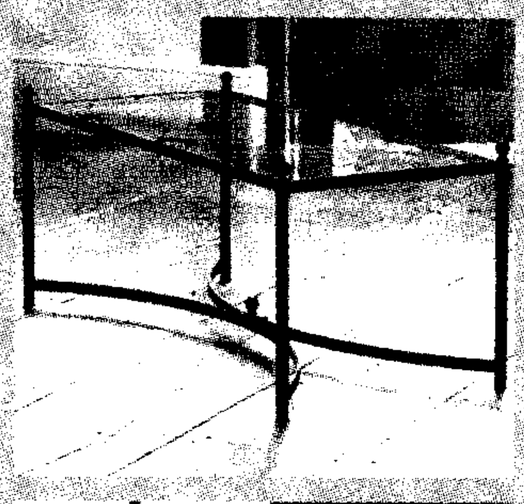
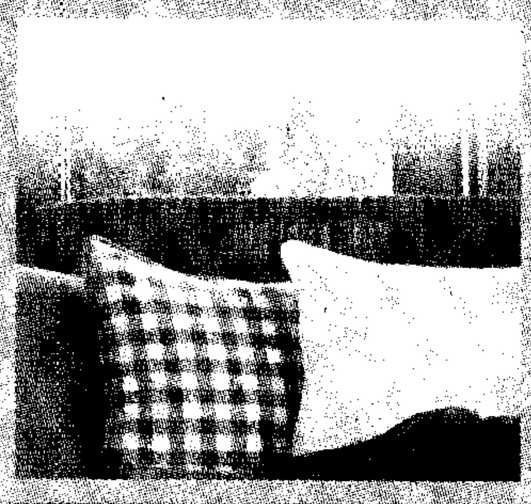

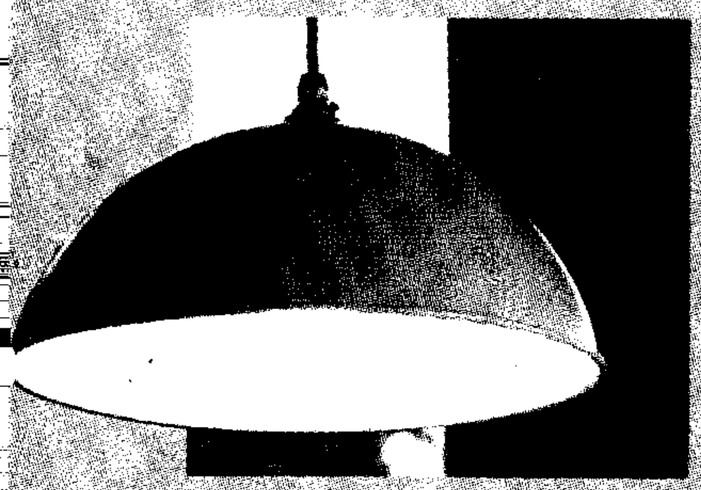
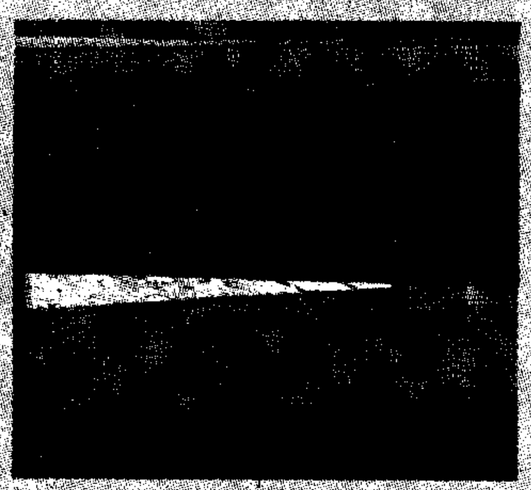

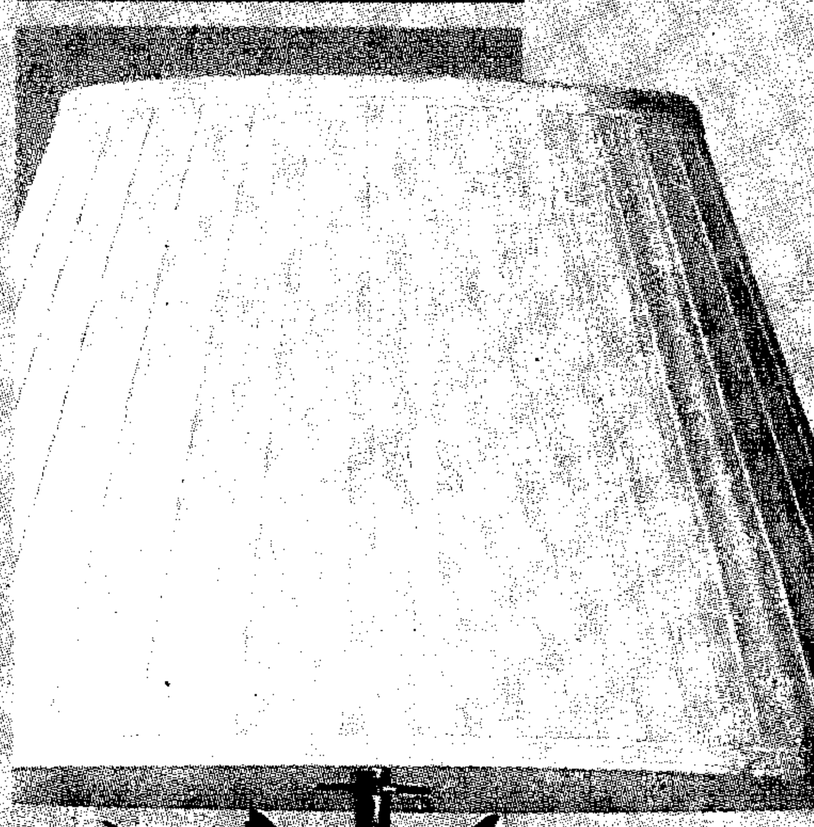

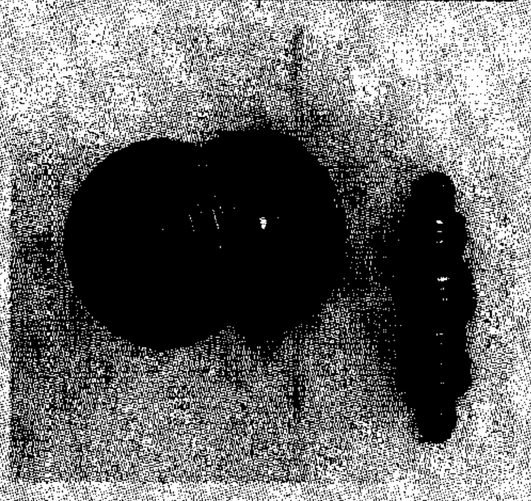
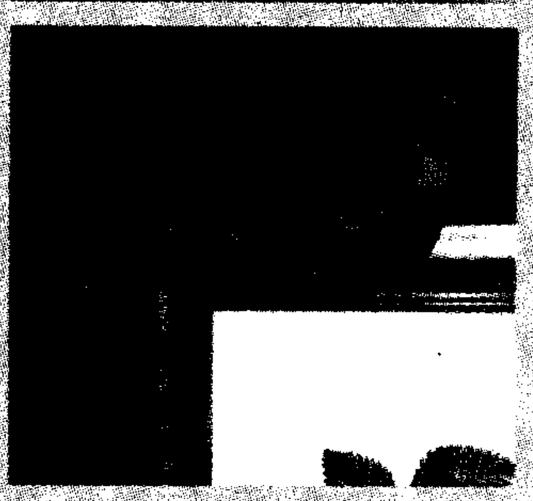
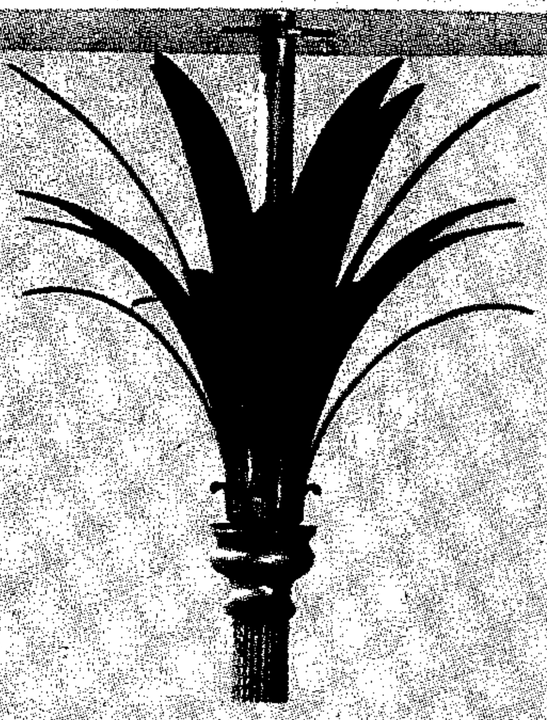
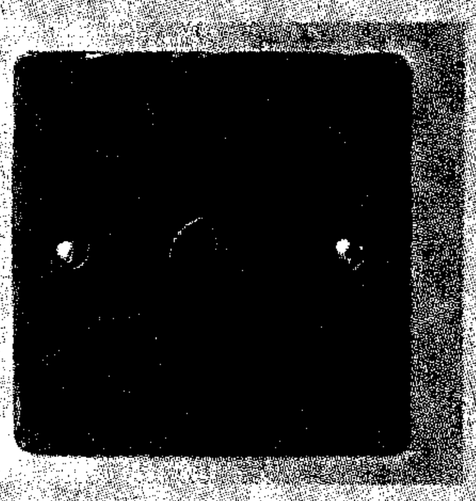
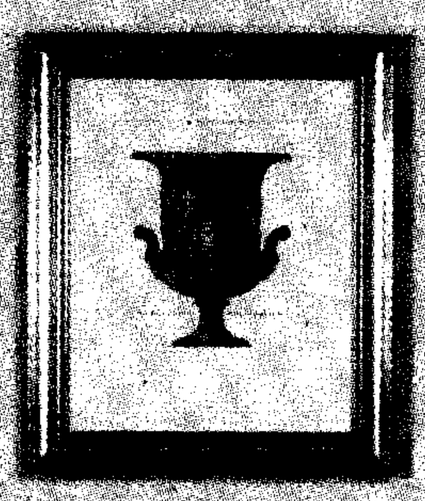
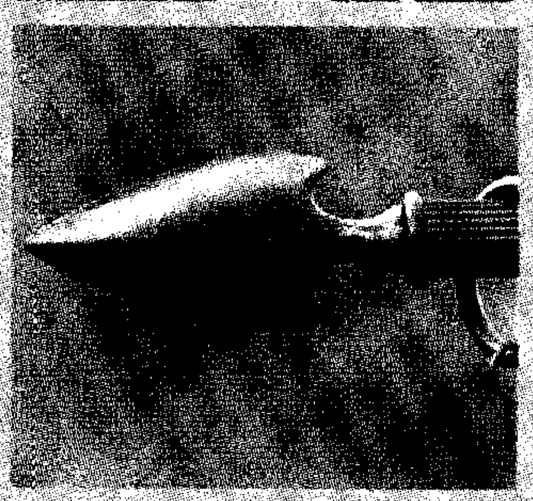

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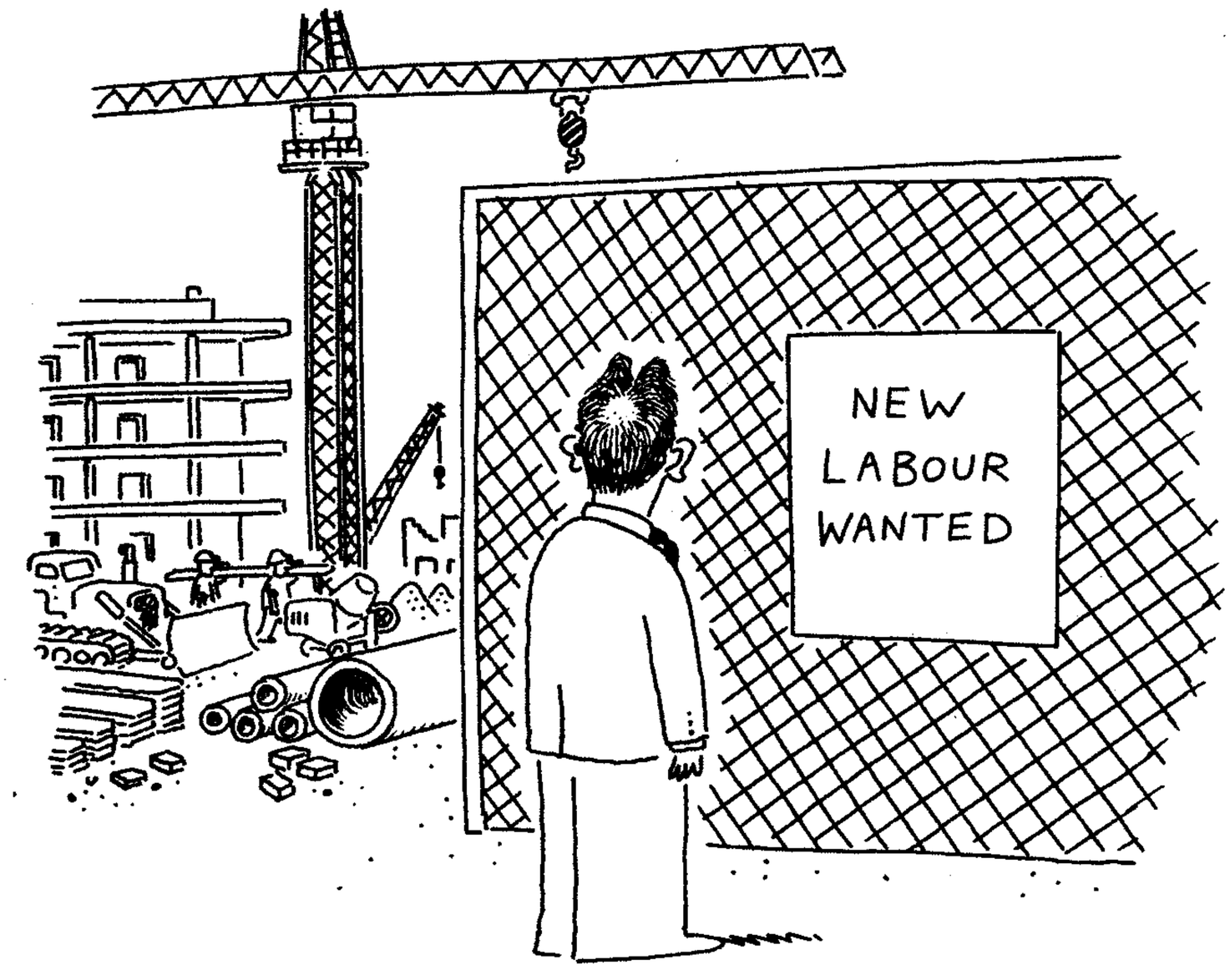

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